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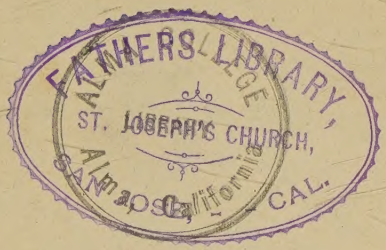
SOLID VIRTUE.



SOLID VIRTUE:

OR,

A TREATISE ON THE OBSTACLES TO SOLID VIRTUE,
THE MEANS OF ACQUIRING, AND
MOTIVES FOR PRACTISING IT.

BY

REV. FATHER BELLÉCIUS, S.J.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY A MEMBER OF THE URSULINE COMMUNITY, THURLES.

With a Preface by
HIS GRACE THE MOST REV. DR. CROKE,

ARCHBISHOP OF CASHEL AND EMLY.

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DANIEL M. RYAN,

Censor Deput.

Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life,

MODEL OF EVERY VIRTUE, AND ITS REWARD,
SWEET SAVIOUR OF MANKIND, MEEK MONARCH OF ALL HEARTS,
RULING WITH PEERLESS RIGHT, YET GENTLEST SWAY;

To Thee, dear Lord,

WITH HOMAGE DEEPEST, AND WITH TENDEREST LOVE,
THIS VERSION IS INSCRIBED,
IN HUMBLE HOPE, AND EARNEST PRAYER,
THAT BY THY MERCY, WHAT IS HEREIN WRIT,
MAY SERVE STILL MORE AND MORE AS TIME GOES ON
TO STAY THE ERRING, AND TO GUIDE THE GOOD,

BY

'Solid Virtue,'

UNTO HEAVEN AND THEE.

PREFACE.

I HAVE been requested to write a few lines by way of preface to the admirable and well-known work of piety entitled 'Solid Virtue' which, originally composed in Latin by Father Bellécius of the Society of Jesus, and afterwards translated into French by the Abbé Berthon, honorary Canon of the Diocese of Poitiers, is now for the first time given to the public in English, by a member of the Ursuline Community at Thurles.

I feel very sincere pleasure in complying with that request. I do so for many reasons, but notably for this one, that it shall be always a source of legitimate pride, of infinite gratification, and possibly of some merit to me, to have my name associated, even in the humblest way, with a book of devotion destined, as I believe this book to be, to advance numerous souls steadily on the path of Christian perfection, and generally to produce wide-spread and abiding good in

the Cloister, within the Sanctuary, and amongst our lay Catholic people.

'Solid Virtue' may well, indeed, be called a golden treatise, for it gives us that which far outweighs silver and gold in value, and which the much-vaunted wealth of this world, supposed by some to be omnipotent, could never enable us to purchase. It tells us in simplest language, and exhaustive detail, of all that goes to constitute genuine devotion, or solid virtue, how it may be practically acquired, what prevents the multitude of believers from attaining it, and how fruitful of choicest grace and happiness it is when attained.

To have acquired solid virtue is simply to be devoted to God. There is, perhaps, no term in the English language that implies more of what is good, and rare, and estimable than the word devotion does, when properly understood. It expresses an ardent attachment, the most absolute dependence, the completest form of self-sacrifice, untiring zeal, the disposition of mind and heart that prompts, or rather impels one to submit unconditionally to the will of another, to study his interests and strive to advance them in everything, to submit to any inconvenience, incur any risk, fearlessly brave all perils, and be reconciled to every manner of privation, for his sake. Thus we say of a very dutiful child that he is devoted to his parents, or of a faithful servant that he is thoroughly devoted to

his master. We say, in like manner, that a person is devoted to ambition or to any other passion, when his chief, or only anxiety is to satisfy it; when he thinks of it often by day and dreams of it by night; and when the contemplation of it so utterly absorbs his attention, that he has little relish for anything else, and but little desire to address himself to any other pursuit.

True devotion, then, in a religious sense, may be said to be the love of God reduced to a settled every-day practice.

From this very simple statement it must be abundantly clear, that we are all bound to aim at the acquisition of what is understood as solid virtue; that we should highly prize every known aid or incentive to it; and that it is a pernicious mistake to think, as many unfortunately have been led to believe, that perfection, in so far as it is at all attainable here below, is the inheritance of but a chosen few, and a thing to be sought after and realised by Religious alone. This is a very common, and I fear, in some instances, a fatal delusion. There were no two Gospels given to the world. There is but one passport to Heaven, and but one high road to everlasting ruin. The Decalogue is the same for all. There is no one privileged to slay or to steal, to take God's holy Name in vain, to tell lies, to profane the Sabbath, to withhold from the

Almighty, or share with any creature whatsoever, the honour and the homage due to Him alone. If you would enter into life, no matter who you are, you must keep the commandments. There exists no special code for men or for women, for cloistered Nun or holy Friar, for priest or layman, for the farmer who tills and toils in the fields, or for the domestic servant who tidies up our household, for the statesman who legislates for a mighty empire, or for the soldier who fortifies and fights for it with his sword. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and thy whole soul, and all thy strength.' This is a universal law. Another universal law is: 'Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

It is true, indeed, that professed Religious are bound to a higher degree of perfection than ordinary mortals: but this is because they have solemnly pledged themselves to it by vow, and are otherwise constrained to it by certain rules and constitutions which they voluntarily engaged to observe. But the general position remains unaltered, nevertheless, that we are all bound to aim at perfection, and that we expose ourselves to forfeit a place in Heaven altogether, if we do not strive to secure a high one. 'Solid Virtue' cannot fail to stimulate our ambition in this respect. The source of our lamentable indifference is twofold; blindness of the understanding, which causes

us not to see, or be practically affected by, the hideousness of vice, or the transcendent beauty of virtue; and languor of the will, because of which we neither estimate virtue as we ought, nor feel at all distressed at its absence, according to the well-known maxim that 'there is no longing for that which is unknown.'

I earnestly recommend this work, then, to all who take an interest in their spiritual advancement; and I pray God to bless and reward the pious and devoted Sister who has rendered so great a treasure accessible to the public.

✠ T. W. CROKE,

Archbishop of Cashel.

THE PALACE, THURLES.
Oct. 28th, 1879.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

ST. IGNATIUS, deeply inpressed with these oracles of Scripture: 'Be perfect' (Matt. v. 48), 'be holy' (Levit. xi. 44), 'God wills your sanctification' (1 Thess. iv. 3), earnestly recommends all his Religious 'to neglect nothing for the acquisition of solid and perfect virtue' (Instit. of the Jesuits, 10th part, 2). This most important and salutary advice it is that has inspired us with the idea of this work.

Solid virtue is the state of a soul confirmed in virtue by a long practice of good works. The object of this work is to establish us in that happy state in which our will is, as it were, naturally inclined to elicit supernatural acts on all occasions with promptitude, fervour, purity of intention, and perseverance. In the First Part, we will endeavour to remove the obstacles which stand in the way of the practice of solid virtue; in the Second, we will point out the means of acquiring this virtue; and in the Third, we will explain the motives which urge us to perfect ourselves daily in it. The First Part relates to the Purgative Way, the Second to the Illuminative Way, and the Third to the Unitive

Way: we will explain and demonstrate the truth of these relations at the conclusion of each of the three Parts.

We may reckon six principal obstacles to solid virtue:—venial sin, tepidity, abuse of grace, the predominant passion, human respect, and sloth in rising in the morning. To these six obstacles we will oppose six means of fortifying ourselves in the ways of sanctity:—the perfection of our ordinary actions, meditation, interior recollection, Holy Communion, the particular examen, and a retreat of three days twice a year. Finally, we will also propose six important motives for tending to perfection:—what faith teaches of the excellence of solid virtue, the fear of the evils which befall those who do not practise it, the hope of the blessings of which it is the source, the love of God which demands and merits that we be solidly virtuous, the happiness enjoyed by the perfect, and finally the crown granted to perseverance.

These obstacles, means, and motives are not, it is true, the only ones that might be adduced for the practice of solid virtue; but as they are the most important we will devote ourselves solely to them in the following considerations. Besides, we may refer to them, as to its principle, all that regards ascetic theology, of which they are the most substantial part.

DOUBLE TABLE,

IN WHICH THE SUBJECTS TREATED OF IN THIS WORK ARE ARRANGED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO BE ABLE TO SERVE FOR TWO RETREATS OF THREE DAYS.

FIRST RETREAT OF THREE DAYS.

ORDER OF THE EXERCISES.

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Consideration.—Of the necessity of Retreat, part 2, ch. 6, art. 1. p. 362. Imitation, bk. 1, ch. 20.

Spiritual Lecture.—The manner of making Retreat, part 2, ch. 6, art. 3, numb. 2, p. 376.

FIRST DAY.

OBSTACLES TO SOLID VIRTUE.

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Spiritual Lecture, before noon.—Continuation of the same subject, numb. 3 and 4, and art. 2, numb. 1, 2, and 3, p. 38.

Examen.—Of the hatred we should entertain for venial sin and the care we should take to avoid it, part 1, ch. 1, art. 4, numb. 1 and 2, p. 57.

Consideration.—Of the effects of tepidity, part 1, ch. 2, art. 2, numb. 1, 2, and 3, p. 69.

Second Meditation.—Of the Chastisements with which God avenges the abuse of grace, part 1, ch. 3, numb. 1, 2, and 3, p. 85. Imitation, bk. 3, ch. 14.

Spiritual Lecture, afternoon.—How prejudicial the Predominant Passion is to the soul, part. 1, ch. 4, art. 1, numb. 1, 2, and 3, p. 106; or if preferred, sloth in rising in the morning, part 1, ch. 6, art. 1, 2, and 3, p. 159.

SECOND DAY.

MEANS OF ACQUIRING SOLID VIRTUE.

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Spiritual Lecture, before noon.—Of the obstacles to prayer, and the means of making it with fruit, part 2, ch. 2, art. 3, numb. 1 and 2, p. 222.

Examen.—Of the means of performing our ordinary actions perfectly, part 2, ch. 1, art. 3, numb. 1, p. 192.

Consideration.—The happy state of a recollected soul, part 2, c . art. 1, numb. 1 and 2, p. 245.

Second Meditation.—Of the injury which redounds to us from negligence in meditation, part 2, ch. 2, art. 1, numb. 1 and 3, p. 201. Imitation, bk. 1, ch. 21.

Spiritual Lecture, afternoon.—Of the means for acquiring interior recollection, part 2, ch. 3, art. 3, numb. 1, p. 269.

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MOTIVES WHICH TEND TO THE PERFECTION OF SOLID VIRTUE.

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Spiritual Lecture, before noon.—Same subject, 1 and 2, p. 415; and art. 2, numb. 1, p. 427.

Examen.—Of the means of alleviating the rigour of the account we shall have to render, part 3, ch. 2, art. 3, numb. 1 and 2, p. 440.

Consideration.—Of the danger of our salvation if we do not attain to a high sanctity, part 3, ch. 2, art. 2, numb. 2, p. 435.

Second Meditation.—Those alone die in peace who apply themselves to their perfection, part 3, ch. 3, art. 2, numb. 1, p. 464. Imitation, bk. 3, ch. 47.

Spiritual Lecture, afternoon.—Those alone live happy who apply themselves to their perfection, part 3, ch. 3, art. 1, numb. 1 and 2, p. 449.

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Spiritual Lecture.—Of the injury which our inconstancy in good causes us, part 3, ch. 6, art. 2, numb. 1, 2, 3, and 4, p. 609.

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Spiritual Lecture, before noon.—Of human respect, part 1, ch. 5, art. 1, numb. 1 and 2, p. 132.

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Second Meditation.—Of the abuse of grace, part 1, ch. 3, art. 1, numb. 1, 2, and 3, p. 85. Imitation, bk. 3, ch. 55.

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SOLID VIRTUE.

PART I.

OF THE CHIEF OBSTACLES TO THE ACQUISITION OF SOLID VIRTUE.

THE fruit to be derived from the considerations presented in this work should be an earnest and persevering effort to acquire solid virtue. To compass this end, it is absolutely necessary to commence by removing the chief obstacles to its attainment. If this be not our first care, all will end in useless desires, and our exertions will be fruitless.

These obstacles are venial sin, tepidity, abuse of grace, the predominant passion, human respect, and sloth in rising in the morning. All these vices injure the life of grace, conspire to destroy the soul, impair its merits, and ruin the work of its perfection; so long as they exist there can be no hope of our acquiring solid virtue. In this first part of the work, therefore, which corresponds to the purgative way, we shall apply ourselves exclusively to the destruction of the smallest vestige of those things so detrimental to our spiritual progress.

CHAPTER I.

OF VENIAL SIN.

MORTAL sin extinguishes charity, banishes the Holy Ghost, withdraws us from our last end which is God, inflicts death on the soul, closes heaven against it, and leads straight to hell.

There can be no question, then, of reckoning this monstrous evil, the very mention of which fills the friends of God with horror and dismay, amongst the obstacles to our progress in virtue. We shall not allude to it here.

Venial sin, according to the Doctors of the Church, is the first obstacle to our perfection. To learn how to avoid it, and to stimulate ourselves to do so, let us reflect that it is a great evil—1st, in itself; 2nd, in its effects; and 3rd, in the chastisement it involves.

We will conclude this chapter by examining whether we entertain a genuine hatred of venial sin and a firm resolution to fly even the least faults.

ARTICLE I.

1. *Of the malice of venial sin considered in itself.*

Mortal sin excepted, there is no evil so great as venial sin.

According to a revelation made to St. Catherine of Genoa, venial sin is a greater evil than all others combined, even including death and hell. St. John Chrysostom, St. Anselm, St. Dorotheus, St. Thomas Aquinas, and all the Fathers unanimously hold this doctrine; and Aristotle, guided by the light of reason alone, teaches

that 'we should prefer to die rather than commit an action contrary to virtue.'[1] To these testimonies a convincing argument is added by St. Thomas, who tells us that, 'the punishment inflicted on sin participates less than the guilt in the nature of evil.'[2] Now, all the pains of this life, nay, even those of hell itself, being but the just punishment of sinners, it follows that the most trivial fault is a greater evil than all those. Besides, God, the essential and infinite sanctity, cannot be the author of sin, though, according to the Theologians, He is the author and positive cause of the punishment of sin. It is true, therefore, 'that the punishment of sin is a lesser evil than the sin itself,'[3] and we should prefer to fall into hell rather than be guilty of it.

Children of men, I will cry out with the Prophet, 'Give ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech.'[4] The least venial sin is a greater evil than all others, not excepting death or hell. The only inference to be drawn from this truth is, that if by the smallest venial sin we could avert the greatest evils and obtain the most substantial and desirable goods for the whole human race, we should not thereby be justified in committing it. Oh! thou who makest light of venial sin, 'drinking iniquity like water,'[5] would to Heaven that this 'were deeply graven on the stone'[6] of thy heart.

Yes, could we by a trivial lie avert all kinds of diseases, wars, famine, conflagrations; could we dispel all sorrows, re-establish our reputation, insure the union of families, preserve our country from imminent calamities; could we, by an impossibility, abridge or prevent the persecutions of Antichrist and extinguish all the

[1] Ethic. [2] 1, q. 48, a. 6. [3] Ibid.
[4] Isai. xxviii. 23. [5] Job xv. 16. [6] Job xix. 24.

fires enkindled by the Divine Justice in the other life, it would not be permitted us to tell that little lie. What do I say? If by a slight emotion of anger we could obtain the conversion of heretics, infidels, and idolators, release from hell and purgatory all the souls therein detained, could we insure the salvation of all mankind, we should not be justified in committing that venial sin. This is a certain truth attested by all the Fathers and Theologians of the Church. It is a dogma of the Christian Faith which cannot be controverted without impiety. The destruction of the world at the end of time, the consternation of nations, the eternal reprobation of the damned, are a less evil than the commission of a venial sin. All these evils only affect the creature, but sin, even such as is only venial, is an injury to God; it saddens and wounds His heart. In proportion, therefore, as the creature is inferior to the Creator, is sin an evil greater than all others.

Between God and the creature there is an infinitely greater disparity than between man and an insect; but since man sacrifices the life of an insect the moment he receives the least inconvenience from it, it must then be incomparably better to consent to the utter annihilation of the whole universe than to offend the Sovereign Majesty by even a light fault.

And yet, 'O ye heavens be very desolate;'[1] men, nay, religious, are to be found who presume to allege this culpable excuse, 'it is only a venial sin!' Oh! how differently we shall regard it at the hour of death

2. *God sovereignly detests venial sin.*

Such is the malice of this sin and such the hatred with which the sanctity of God pursues it, that even

[1] Jerem. ii. 12.

should a soul be enriched during its sojourn here with all the purity of virgins, the faith and constancy of the martyrs, the zeal of the apostles, and the perfection of St. John the Baptist, still should a single light fault remain unexpiated, God would keep that soul separated from Him till it should have been purified in the flames of purgatory.

Furthermore, if by an impossibility a saint in heaven were, by the least sin, to fall from the state of confirmed sanctity, which is the prerogative of the intuitive vision, that very instant, rejected from the bosom of God with the rapidity of lightning, it would be precipitated into purgatory, there to atone for a transient forgetfulness, a momentary weakness of the will. 'Nothing defiled can enter heaven,'[1] such is the oracle of the Holy Ghost. For the same reason nothing defiled could remain there one second.

Consider, you who are so indifferent about venial sin, who it is that shall be the avenger of it, and on whom and through what motives He shall exercise the severity of His wrath. It is the God of all goodness, He whose mercy is above all His works. Yes, He it is who for a single venial sin would so severely exercise the rights of His justice on the saints, His most beloved friends.

Nor does God punish beyond what is just; on the contrary, His Heart is a very furnace of love and mercy.

The saints themselves would willingly cast themselves from their thrones of glory into the fire of hell rather than be guilty of the least transgression. They would even esteem themselves happy could they, by enduring these devouring flames, prevent a light fault. And this

[1] Apoc. xxi 27.

heroic disposition is but simple justice, since, according to several learned Theologians, one venial sin does more injury to God than the united and eternal praises of the saints give Him glory.

Again reflect, you who contemn venial sin, and weigh its grievousness, not in the deceitful balance of human judgment, but in the unerring scales of the sanctuary.

Behold in what light God, Jesus Christ, and the saints regard such a fault, whilst you have the temerity to excuse it. The saints tremble at the idea of venial sin; the mere shadow of it makes the angels shudder and fills the heart of the Queen of Angels with anguish. And man, vile clay, has the audacity to commit it every moment in presence of the adorable Trinity, counting as nought the injury that results from it to God! Can it be possible that man alone regards as insignificant what the saints view as the greatest of evils, mortal sin excepted? Is it possible that a Christian, a religious especially, should make light of a fault for which he shall one day have to render a strict account? Nothing can be light by which the Sovereign Majesty is offended, nor can any fault be trivial which the sanctity of God condemns.

3. *The creature cannot of himself make adequate satisfaction for venial sin.*

To realise more fully the inconceivable malice of this sin, let us suppose that all the saints, prostrate before the throne of the Most High, were to offer him their united merits to atone for one venial sin; the Seraphim to present Him their love; the Patriarchs their faith; the Prophets their courage; the Apostles their preachings; the Pontiffs their zeal; the Martyrs their blood; the

Confessors their penance; the Virgins their purity; the august Mother of God her incomparable sanctity. It would all be useless. These merits would bear no proportion to the offence offered to the Almighty by that venial sin. No one, not even the just man, with the merit of the habitual grace which enriches his soul, can, of himself, adequately satisfy for his own sin or that of his neighbour.

Let us maturely weigh the extent and bearings of our proposition. A lie told in jest, a slight emotion of anger, tepidity at prayer, include a transgression of so serious a nature that the burning love of the Seraphim, the eternal praise of the blessed, and the powerful prayers of the saints offered to the 'Lamb as sweet odours in golden vials,'[1] are not meet satisfaction for such a sin.

How deplorable is our blindness when we commit it so unconcernedly!

4. *Venial sin combined with mortal is the cause of the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ.*

Come, Angels of peace,[2] come in mourning and desolation to see your God expire. But thou, sinner, listen and tremble. Those light faults, which thou regardest as trifles, have caused the sufferings of Jesus Christ, and have robbed Him of life. 'He was wounded for our iniquities; He was bruised for our sins;'[3] 'He is dead for our sins,'[4] and even for our venial sins, for which also He has satisfied His Eternal Father by His passion. Yes, sinner! The Lamb without spot was covered with wounds on account of thy vain, idle, lying words; He was bruised on account of thy irreverences

[1] Apoc. v. 8. [2] Isai. xxxiii. 7. [3] Isai. liii. 5. [4] 1 Cor. xv. 3.

and distractions at prayer; 'He was accounted amongst the wicked'[1] to expiate thy jealousy, thy vanity, thy pride, and thy detractions. In fine, 'He has borne in His body'[2] the punishment due even to thy venial sins.

By each of thy venial sins thou hast added new torments to the passion and sufferings of Jesus Christ; thou hast committed a crime for which this loving Saviour was bound, laden with chains, scourged, crowned with thorns—a crime, in a word, which, combined with mortal sin, consummated on the cross a horrible deicide. What, unhappy soul! thou beholdest the consequences of thy sin, and yet thou abhorrest it not? Thy heart is not broken with sorrow. It is, then, harder than the rocks which split at the death of the Saviour.

But the malice of venial sin does not end here. Not content with having once shed the blood of a God, it daily renews the atrocious insults that accompanied the torment of Calvary—a torment which spread consternation through all nature 'when the sun was darkened, the graves opened, the veil of the Temple was rent.'[3] If mortal sin crucifies again the Son of God, venial sin, according to the Fathers, renews against our Divine Master the ignominy of the derisions, blows, and insults. And yet man has the temerity to style such a fault light! O heavens! to strike the Son of God, to tear His hair, to cover His venerable face with spittle! Is this, then but a light offence?—to load you with insults, O Divine Jesus! to overwhelm you with ignominy and outrages would, at most, be but a pardonable thoughtlessness in a Christian! Ah! who can restrain the thunderbolts of heaven from avenging such conduct!

[1] Isai. liii. 12. [2] 1 Peter ii. 24. [3] Luke xxiii. 45.

'Woe to you who drag these iniquities like a long chain.'[1] Woe to you, for the just avenger 'is about to come, and He will not delay.'[2]

My God, 'may my eyes shed torrents of tears,'[3] may they never cease to weep, because my offences 'exceed in number the hairs of my head.'[4] 'I have sinned, I have done evil in Thy sight,'[5] and a very great evil, when I committed even a venial sin; but for Thy love, my God, I am sorry for it with my whole heart. Terrified at its turpitude, I resolve never again, at least with full deliberation, to allow it to sully my soul.

I promise, 'O living God, in whose sight I stand,'[6] 'that as long as breath remaineth in me my lips shall not speak iniquity, neither shall my tongue contrive lying.'[7] I will willingly relinquish all I possess, and suffer all evils rather than 'deliver my soul'[8] even to venial sin. But Thou knowest, O my God, that of myself I can but sin and lose my soul; deign, then, 'to confirm what Thou hast wrought in us,'[9] 'and assist us to accomplish the good resolutions Thy grace has inspired us to make.'

Article II.

Of the malice of venial sin considered in its effects

1. *It vitiates virtuous actions.*

Venial sin is a very great evil in its effects. As 'dying flies spoil the sweetness of the ointment,'[11] so venial sin corrupts virtuous actions; and when it affects the foundation or principal intention of them it diminishes their value to such a degree that, ceasing to be

[1] Isai. v. 18. [2] Habac. ii. 3. [3] Ps. cxviii. 136.
[4] Ps. xxxix. 13. [5] Ps. l. 6. [6] 4 Kings iii. 14.
[7] Job xxvii. 3. [8] Eccles. xix. 4. [9] Ps. lxvii. 29.
[10] St. Aug. [11] Eccles. 10. 1.

acts of a supernatural order, they no longer merit eternal rewards. 'Take heed that you do not your justice before men, that you may be seen by them, otherwise you shall have no reward of your Father who is in heaven.'[1] What conclusion are we to come to from these words of Jesus Christ, unless it be that virtue itself, if it originate in vain glory, shall receive no recompense in eternity?

But a thought of vain glory which determines us to the performance of a good work, being only a venial sin,[2] it follows that the fact of being vitiated in its motive by this species of sin suffices to rob an action of all its value and merit. St. Jerome affirms that, 'martyrdom itself, if endured solely to win human applause, would be a fruitless sacrifice,'[3] destitute of all merit in the sight of God. St. Thomas, examining this question of venial sin, decides that, 'if an action be performed through vain glory it is no longer meritorious of eternal life, even though this bad disposition should not amount to mortal sin.'[4] Elsewhere he thus confirms this doctrine: 'though the action of him who gives alms through vanity be not bad under all its relations, still the act of the will is altogether wicked.'[5] It is true, therefore, that when venial sin so far influences the will as to be its directing principle, it is a poison which vitiates and completely destroys our good actions. Though our life were a continual prayer, though we should dispense treasures into the bosom of the poor, macerate our body by penance, exceed the angels in purity, excel the good

[1] Matt. vi. 1.

[2] St. Thomas expressly says that the vain glory against which Jesus Christ here warns us is only a venial sin.

[3] On 1st Chap. of Epist. to Gal. [4] St. Thom. 2. 2, q. 132, a. 3.

[5] St. Thom. 1. 2, q. 19, a. 7.

Samaritan in charity, and at the same time practise patience, humility, and obedience in an heroic degree, still all these virtues would be devoid of merit should our heart unhappily imbibe the poison of pride, self-love, or sensuality, and those apparently laudable actions would degenerate into faults deserving of punishment.

Finally, though we should offer a pure intention to God on awaking, being careful to renew it frequently during the day, still the commission of a venial sin weakens its influence; it diminishes and sometimes even nullifies the value of our works till they be consecrated by a new oblation.

My soul! venial sin has mingled a base alloy with the gold of thy good works. With diabolical craft it has contrived to rob thee of the heavenly treasures thou mightest have each day amassed; it has robbed of its fairest ornaments the heavenly crown that it destined for thee.

Each time that it has so far insinuated itself as to exercise a directing influence on our actions, it has annihilated their merit and bereft us of so many degrees of eternal glory.

And yet, notwithstanding all this, we find it difficult to detest it; we even love and cherish it!

2. *It cools charity.*

Another lamentable effect of venial sin is, that it not merely vitiates virtuous actions and impedes our increase of merits, but it likewise 'diminishes' in us the 'fervour of charity'[1] by rendering us so slothful in the service of God and so callous to our eternal interests

[1] St. Thom. 3, q. 79, a. 4.

that the heart of our Divine Master cannot long tolerate our tepidity.

'A servant of God must avoid the least faults, if he would not soon see his love grow cool'[1] and a mortal languor take possession of his soul. Religious themselves, notwithstanding the powerful grace of their vocation, if they allow themselves to entertain 'a contempt for small faults, insensibly lose their fervour'[2] and fall into tepidity, a state whose fatal effects should induce us to fly it as the empoisoned source of countless evils. Yes; sad experience teaches that even the slightest faults lead us unawares to tepidity. See a man who commits them almost every moment without scruple: his soul grows languishing; the exercises of piety disgust him; he practises no self-imposed mortifications; shrinks from everything that requires the least effort; commences slothfully and continues apathetically whatever he undertakes, so that no, or at least very little, fruit results from anything he does. Completely engrossed with earthly things, those of heaven are perfectly insipid to him: he has not courage to restrain his sensual appetites, he tires of meditation, and religious practices of all kinds are irksome to him; he is hurried on to vice as by a natural tendency; self-indulgence and the gratification of the senses seem to be the one object of his life. With virtue thus enfeebled, how can the fervour of charity be preserved, or rather, how can it fail to be extinguished altogether? What pen could depict in sufficiently vivid colouring a misfortune so great? So perfect and precious a gift is the charity of God, or, if you will, sanctifying grace which 'is poured forth in our hearts,'[3] that there is nothing which

[1] Life of St. Laur. Justinian. [2] St. Anselm. [3] Rom. v. 5.

can bear the remotest comparison with it. When you renounce it, therefore, O soul created for heaven, what a loss do you not sustain ? Now, 'venial sin' indirectly 'attacks the possession of this inestimable treasure' and 'paves the way to its utter loss.'[1] Not that venial sin immediately destroys or even gradually diminishes sanctifying grace, but it arrests its progress and leads the way to its ruin by causing the soul that commits it to fall into tepidity. Thus, St. Thomas teaches that, 'though charity, according to its nature, cannot be diminished directly, it can nevertheless be diminished indirectly by venial sin, which is a disposition to the corruption and loss of this virtue.'[2] Charity, it is true, 'is a devouring fire and a consuming flame'[3] but the ardours of this divine virtue are extinguished by a multitude of venial sins, as fire is extinguished by too great a quantity of super-incumbent ashes.

3. *It in some manner separates the soul from God.*

'Venial sin,' says St. Thomas, 'by attracting our will towards a created object, weakens its love for the Sovereign Good and thus establishes the commencement of a divorce between them.'[4] Oh! fearful thought! Could there be anything more calculated to inspire us with a horror of this sin ?

Christian soul, weigh well this truth: a venial sin does not entirely separate you from God, but it begins to withdraw you from Him: it renders you less worthy the cares of His especial Providence and of that love of predilection with which He protects the just man from

[1] St. Thom. 2. 2, q. 24. a. 10.
[2] St. Thom. 2. 2, q. 24, a. 10
[3] Cant. viii. 6.
[4] St. Thom. 3, q. 87, a. 1.

evil, loads him with blessings, and makes all things 'work together unto good.'[1]

After your sin this infinitely loving Father no longer receives you as affectionately as He was wont to do; He no longer opens His arms to you with His accustomed tenderness.

But if grace suffer a diminution, what will become of you? Alas! assailed by a thousand temptations, exposed almost alone to the darts of the enemy, will you not experience disastrous defeats? At present you give yourself but little concern about the imminence of your danger and the withdrawal of the divine assistance of which you as little comprehend the value as you fear the consequences of your fall; but woe to you if your reflections on it be postponed till eternity dawns upon you!

4. *It sullies the soul.*

Venial sin imprints a shameful stain on the soul which disfigures and dishonours it in the sight of God. 'It is a stain which tarnishes the lustre of innocence and obscures the natural beauty of the soul.'[2] 'A loathsome leprosy which does not, it is true, deprive it of life, but which covers it over with its horrible deformity.'[3] 'It is a hideous wound which makes us an object of loathing to our heavenly Spouse and deprives us of His chaste embraces.'[4] And yet, in spite of all this, we give it free access to our heart on every occasion that offers!

How different were the sentiments of the saints respecting this sin. St. Catherine of Genoa would have preferred to be cast into a fiery furnace, St. Anselm to

[1] Rom. viii. 28.
[2] St. Basil on 4th chap. Isai.
[3] St. Cæsarius of Arles Homil.
[4] St. Aug.

be precipitated into hell, St. John Chrysostom to be possessed by the devil, rather than consent to the least fault, whilst we multiply them incessantly. Day after day we accumulate them, forgetting that the most ordinary and at the same time the most dreadful effect of a habit of venial sin is to plunge the soul into the abyss of mortal sin and thence into hell.

5. *It disposes to mortal sin.*

Oh, awful effect of venial sin! Hearken, O sinner, you who make a jest of light faults, hearken to this oracle of St. Thomas: 'Frequent falls into venial sin are a disposition to mortal.'[1] Five times in the same article he repeats this proposition, and he even returns to it elsewhere to develop it still more. This teaching is perfectly in accordance with that of all the Fathers of the Church, especially of St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, St. John Damascene, and St. Gregory. But it is not merely the Fathers who have taught us that venial sin disposes to mortal, the Holy Ghost Himself has done so in these words: 'He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little.' He whom this menace fails to inspire with a horror of venial sin is very near his ruin. No one reaches an excess of crime at the first step; and probably there is not a soul in hell to-day who had not sinned venially before falling into mortal sin; so that very frequently eternal damnation is but the sad consequence of a single venial sin.

Not that of itself it deserves eternal punishment, but it gradually conducts to such a degree of prevarication as consummates the ruin of the soul. St. Teresa beheld in a vision the place prepared for her in hell if she per-

[1] St. Thom. 1. 2, q, 88, a. 3.

sisted in a habit she had contracted of idle, worldly conversation with a young relative of a light disposition. And mark, this was not a mortal sin, for she had always sedulously shunned grave faults. My God! if a fault apparently so excusable would have compassed the destruction of that great saint, how should not we tremble considering the many and far more reprehensible habits of which we are the slaves!

You say that possibly your salvation may not depend on these little things; but perhaps also it may depend on them. Will you then risk your soul, your eternity, the possession of God, on so chimerical an alternative?

Had St. Teresa reasoned thus, she would have been lamentably deceived and have perished for ever. Why should you not fear a similar fate? Unhappy you if you persevere in despising venial faults, as the forfeiture of your eternal happiness may possibly be the result of what now causes you so little uneasiness.

Oh, inexcusable folly! the fear of death has sufficient influence over us to induce us to avoid, with the utmost care, all that could impair our health; and yet we deliberately commit venial sin which may imperceptibly lead us to hell.

Ah! let us dread and vigilantly guard against the wily and perfidious serpent which, if cherished in our bosom, would compass the ruin of our immortal soul by the deadly venom of its bite.

Alas! 'my life hath drawn nigh to hell,'[1] 'and I knew not.'[2] Hurried on by my light faults to the brink of the precipice, I was already enveloped with 'the smoke of their torments,' 'which shall ascend for ever and ever,'[3] and I experienced no anxiety.

[1] Ps. lxxxvii. 4. [2] Ps. lxxii. 22. [3] Apoc. xiv. 11.

Ah! Lord, hadst Thou not hastened to my assistance I should have long since fallen from venial into mortal sin, 'I should dwell with devouring fire, and with everlasting burning."[1] But, 'O Keeper of men,'[2] who 'hatest the least iniquity,'[3] to Thy creature, 'reach out Thy right hand,'[4] 'lift me up from the gates of death,'[5] 'and lead me on the paths of justice,'[6] in order that I may no longer stray away from Thee, and may shun even the least faults. 'Place Thy Angel with a flaming sword at the gate of my heart to guard the entrance of it.'[7]

Article III.

Of the malice of venial sin considered with reference to the punishment it entails.

1. *Chastisements in this life.*

Moses is a striking example of the vengeance sometimes exercised by divine justice on venial sin, in this life. He was, says the Holy Scripture, 'beloved of God and men.'[8] 'The Lord spoke to him face to face as a man is wont to speak to his friend.'[9] 'He made him like the saints in glory, He glorified him in the sight of kings.'[10] 'After him no prophet was found like to him in Israel."[11]

This great man, 'the chief of the princes of Israel, the consecrator of the Pontiffs of the Old Law,'[12] who was always 'superior to his passions, who disdained all the temporal joys of Egypt, who, in his chaste conversations with God, received a vivid impression of sanctity, and, as

[1] Isai. xxxiii. 14. [2] Job vii. 20. [3] Ps. xliv. 8.
[4] Job. xiv. 15. [5] Ps. ix. 15. [6] Ps. xxii. 3.
[7] Gen. iii. 24. [8] Eccles. xlv. 1. [9] Exod. xxxiii. 11.
[10] Ecclus. xlv. 2. [11] Deut. xxxiv. 10. [12] St. Greg. Naz. disc. 22.

it were, the plenitude of all virtues;'[1] this great man had the misfortune to fall into a slight sin of distrust, which, in the opinion of the most esteemed theologians, was but a venial fault: 'he struck the rock twice with his rod.'[2] 'He feared,' says St. Augustine, 'lest the sins of the people should prove an obstacle to the divine promise and render his word powerless to draw water from the rock.' But, oh, terrible effect of the divine wrath on a fault seemingly so slight! God instantaneously issued forth this dreadful decree: 'Go up to the mountain of Nebo.'[3] 'Thou shalt see the land before thee, but thou shalt not enter it.'[4] 'Thou shalt not lead these people into the land that I will give them.'[5] 'Thou shalt be gathered to thy people.'[6] 'Moses went up to the mountain and died there.'[7] So prompt and inevitable is the execution of divine justice. Oh, fearful warning! 'Howl, thou fir-tree, for the cedar is fallen.'[8] He is fallen, this elect one, struck by the hand of God Himself. He is fallen just as he is about to enter the promised land, the land 'flowing with milk and honey.'[9] He can behold it; for long years it has been the object of his most cherished aspirations, at length he is about to reach it after unheard-of toils and trials. Vain hope! for one light fault he is doomed never to enter it! He dies, and his death is accompanied by circumstances the most calculated to enhance the severity of his punishment. The Almighty, as though fearing to be moved by the prayers of Moses, forbids him to solicit pardon. 'It is sufficient, speak no more to me of this matter;'[10] and to divest his servant of even the consolation of hope He confirms by an oath the sentence

[1] St. Ambr. [2] Numb. xx. 11. [3] Deut. xxxii. 49.
[4] Deut. xxxii. 52. [5] Numb. xx. 12. [6] Deut. xxxii. 50.
[7] Deut. xxxiv. 1, 5. [8] Zach. xi. 2. [9] Deut. vi. 3. [10] Deut. iii. 26.

of death He has pronounced. 'The Lord hath sworn that Moses should not pass over the Jordan.'[1] He even names to him his successor: 'Thou shalt not go in thither, but Josue, the son of thy minister, he shall go in for thee.'[2] But the severity of the sentence is about to reach its climax. 'Go up to the top of Phasga, and cast thy eyes round about, to the west, and to the north, and to the south, and to the east;[3] 'behold the land for which I swore to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. Thou hast seen it and shalt not pass over to it.'[4] What a trial for Moses! What an expiation for his sin! 'Lord, be not angry, I beseech Thee, if I speak to Thee, whereas I am but dust and ashes;'[5] 'consider that it is Moses Thy servant, from whom Thou exactest so severe a retribution for so slight a fault; Moses, who denied himself to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter, rather choosing to be afflicted with the children of God, than to have the pleasure of sin for a time;'[6] Moses, who, burning with a holy indignation, 'laying hold of the golden calf, the execrable object of Jewish idolatry, burnt it and beat it to powder;'[7] 'who was the meekest of men;'[8] who, during a period of forty years, bore the mutinies and revolts of a stiff-necked people with invincible patience; who, instead of avenging their contempt of his authority, their outrages and violent assault with stones, offered for them the inimitable prayer: Lord, 'either forgive them this trespass or strike me out of the book that Thou hast written;'[9] it is Moses, in fine, whom Thou hast Thyself declared to be 'the most faithful in all Thy house.'[10] What, O 'God of clemency!'[11] Thou whose

[1] Deut. iv. 21. [2] Deut. i. 37, 38.
[3] Deut. iii. 27. [4] Deut. xxxiv. 4. [5] Gen. xviii. 27, 30.
[6] Hebr. xi. 24. [7] Exod. xxxii. 20. [8] Numb. xii. 3.
[9] Exod. xxxii. 31, 32. [10] Numb. xii. 7. [11] Acts xxiv. 4.

mercy knoweth no bounds, whose Heart is an inexhaustible treasure of goodness, Thou refusest to pardon him! Thou dost not even postpone his punishment! Is he then who so often propitiated Thy anger in favour of others the only one towards whom Thou art unrelenting? Lord, Lord, remember thy former kindnesses. Vain prayer! 'The Lord hath sworn, and He will not repent.'[1] The fiat has gone forth. Moses must die. The splendour of his miracles, the greatness of his merits, the number and perfection of his virtues, will not obtain the revocation of his sentence. He must die for a fault which seems to us so slight, die on Mount Nebo, from which, to augment his grief, he will behold the fertile regions of the promised land.

What an awful lesson to future ages of the enormity of venial sin!

Unhappy we! 'If in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?'[2] If Moses is punished unsparingly for *one* venial sin, what have not we to expect who daily and maliciously multiply our offences?

Traverse ancient Judea in spirit, and at every step you will meet with some memorial of misfortune and death. Here you will see 'seventy thousand men falling victims to a pestilence;'[3] there 'fifty thousand Bethsamites suddenly struck dead;'[4] later on, 'all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, are carried away by the King of Babylon; he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the valiant men of the army, and he carried away the king's mother and his wives and his children into captivity.'[5]

[1] Ps. cix. 4. [2] Luke xxiii. 31.
[3] 2 Kings xxiv. 15. [4] 1 Kings vi. 19. [5] 4 Kings xxiv. 13, 14, 15.

Would we not imagine that such dire misfortunes as these must have been provoked by some abominable crime on the part of the Jews, such as a relapse into idolatry, murmurs against God, or the obstinate violation of some important precept? But no. These tremendous chastisements have another source. A mere thought of pride in David, a passing feeling of ostentation in Ezechias, a slightly irreverent look at the ark by the Bethsamites, such are the causes of all this mourning and desolation. And yet all theologians agree they were only venial sins. 'The Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel,'[1] because David had commanded Joab 'to make a census of the people in order to know the number of his subjects.'[2] 'The Bethsamites were stricken because having seen the Ark of the Lord,'[3] they gazed on it with a curiosity somewhat wanting in respect. 'All that was in the house of the King of Juda was carried away'[4] to Babylon, 'because the heart of Ezechias had yielded to vanity.'[5] Such are the chastisements inflicted by God on these kings and peoples, and yet David was 'a man according to God's own heart.'[6] 'Ezechias was without an equal for religion amongst the kings of Juda.'[7] 'The Bethsamites' had shown their piety 'that very day by immolating victims and holocausts to the Lord.'[8] Oh! how truly awful are the judgments of God, how dreadful the malice of venial sin!

But, you will ask, does man, whose nature is so frail, in falling into venial sin commit so great a fault that God must launch forth the thunderbolts of His vengeance against him? The Almighty does not so promptly yield to anger; 'He knows that we are dust'[9] and 'we have

[1] 1 Parlip. xxi. 14. [2] 2 Kings xxiv. 2. [3] 1 Kings vi. 19.
[4] 4 Kings xx. 17. [5] 2 Parlip. xxxii. 26. [6] 1 Kings xiii. 14.
[7] 4 Kings xviii. 5. [8] 1 Kings vi. 15. [9] Ps. cii. 14.

not a high priest who cannot have compassion on our infirmities.'[1] Great chastisements suppose great crimes, and light faults do not demand so exemplary an expiation. Rash words! The Divine Judge was then guilty of injustice when for a venial sin He inflicted such signal chastisements on Moses, David, Oza, the Bethsamites, and Ezechias? He did not proportion the punishments to the offence in the various chastisements recorded in Scripture and Ecclesiastical History? Ah! 'let us cease to accuse God of injustice.'[2] Let us rather measure the malice of venial sin by the rigour with which it is punished even in this life by Him who is 'a God merciful and gracious, patient and of much compassion.'[3]

2. *Chastisements in the other life.*

The enormity of venial sin is rendered still more evident by the chastisements inflicted on it in the other life, as they are more numerous, intense, and lasting.

According to St. Augustine, St. Anselm, Venerable Bede, and many others, the pains of purgatory exceed all the torments of the martyrs, the various punishments to which malefactors are subjected, and the most excruciating agony of all kinds of diseases taken collectively. St. Cæsarius tells us, 'the fire of purgatory is a greater torture than all the evils that can be suffered or even imagined in this world;'[4] and St. Thomas adds that, 'the least pain endured in that place of expiation surpasses all the sufferings of this life.'[5] And yet who can number the multiplied calamities to which man is sometimes subjected during his life! Who can reckon all the miseries, all the afflictions that pursue him from the

[1] Heb. iv. 15. [2] Job xxxiv. 10. [3] Exod. xxxiv. 6.
[4] Homil. [5] Lombard, 4, d. 9, a. 4.

cradle to the grave! See the unfortunate wretches tortured on the rack, or condemned to the intolerable labours and privations of the galleys; approach these unhappy beings stretched on a bed of anguish, the victims of incurable and excruciating diseases. What a sad spectacle of human woes!

We are told by Galenus that a person may experience several thousands of different kinds of pain in the head alone. If to these we unite all the interior and exterior sufferings to which the human frame is liable, what a complication of miseries shall we not behold! And yet, they are not comparable to the pains of purgatory. This is an undisputable fact. There all conceivable torments unite in the soul as in their centre, without allowing one moment's respite or alleviation. It endures at one and the same time according to the number and nature of its faults, all the physical and mental sufferings by which the members and senses of the body and the faculties of the mind can be tormented; and this not for a few days or weeks, but it may be for long years!

But to continue: the tortures of these expiatory furnaces, inconceivable in their number, intolerable in their severity, overwhelming in their duration, are inflicted for venial faults. . . . Yes, for venial faults! . . . for a trivial lie, for a slight emotion of anger, for the voluntary distraction of a moment, for an idle word, for some moments ill spent; for those faults of such frequent recurrence that our lives are, as it were, a tissue of them, And on whom are these penalties inflicted? On predestined souls, spouses of Jesus Christ, children of God, heirs of heaven. They are inflicted, too, by an infinitely just God, who does not punish sin beyond what it deserves, and who entertains the tenderest love for these

souls. From this we must conclude either that God is an unjust and ruthless tyrant, the mere thought of which is blasphemy, or that venial sin is a dreadful evil. Yes, Religious! Yes, Christian soul! either God is a relentless tyrant, or thy vain glory, thy dissipation, thy impatience are worthy of all abhorrence.

My God! we believe those truths, we teach them to others, and still we continue to sin. We know that a slight infidelity deserves purgatory, and yet we pursue our reckless career.

Were we assured that we should be burned alive after the commission of two or three venial sins, how circumspect we should be to avoid the least faults! And yet, though we know the flames of purgatory must expiate those with which our souls are stained, we do not hesitate to multiply them, 'we drink iniquity like water!'[1]

O God! I, vile dust as I am, have presumed to offend Thee, the Sovereign Good, and this, notwithstanding all the favours Thou hast lavished on me. . . . I have offended Thee so repeatedly . . . for amusement . . . for a nothing . . . through pure caprice, without being even incited thereto by the hope of any gain or the apprehension of any loss. Were I to win an empire, or avert a torturing disease, nay, even death itself, by disobeying Thee slightly, I would not be justified in doing so. I am aware of this, and yet, day after day, hour after hour, and with a smile upon my lips, I have accumulated venial sin to an overwhelming amount! I have offended God with utter unconcern. . . . God, my infinitely tender Father; for a base interest, through vain glory, through jest. Led on by venial sin to the imminent danger of mortal, reckless of my salvation, I have laughed at and contemned the pains of purgatory, which I have deserved!

[1] Job xv. 16.

Oh! well may we weep tears of blood over such an infatuation.

But I repent, I bewail all, even my least faults. I desire to imprint indelibly on my heart the holy maxim: 'Rather die a thousand deaths than sully my soul with any sin, however light.' 'O my God, enlighten my darkness,'[1] that henceforth I may fully realise the grievousness of venial sin. 'Create a clean heart in me,'[1] that I may abhor and shun all that could in any way displease Thee.

Article IV.

Of the hatred we should entertain for venial sin and the care with which we should avoid it.

The fruits of the truths we have just been meditating should be not only a more perfect knowledge, but also an efficacious hatred of venial sin, and a zealous endeavour to avoid it.

These two points shall constitute the matter of this fourth article. We shall treat of them under the form of an examen, which method we will observe during the remainder of this work, in which, as a rule, the last article of each chapter shall be a particular examen on the subject of which it treats.

1. *Of the efficacious hatred of venial sin.*

Knowing the malice of venial sin, considered in itself, in its effects, and in the dreadful chastisement it involves; let us examine ourselves, and see how far our detestation of all, but particularly of fully deliberate venial sin extends. 'Do we firmly believe that the least sin can do us more injury than all the powers of hell?[3]

[1] Ps. xvii. 29. [2] Ps. l. 12. [3] St. Teresa 25.

'Are we fully persuaded that death and the loss of all temporal goods are less to be dreaded than the smallest stain of venial sin?'[1] Let us candidly examine our sentiments on this subject. Do we believe these truths? Do we believe them with a firm and unwavering faith? Would we prefer, with St. Anselm, to descend with a pure and innocent heart into hell than to enter heaven stained with the least sin? Should we have the misfortune to fall into venial sin, do we experience as much remorse as a good Christian, zealous for his salvation, feels when he permits himself to be seduced into mortal sin? If by a trivial lie we could avert a dangerous illness, prevent the loss of our reputation, escape severe sufferings, obtain an honourable and lucrative employment, would we not tell that lie?

If at the expense of a venial sin we could preserve something very dear and precious to us, how would we act? Let us interrogate our conscience, and let such questions be the touchstones whereby we may learn how far our hatred of venial sin extends. Let us afterwards exclaim with the venerable Eleazar: Yes, 'I would rather die'[2] than commit such a fault. Should we not have the courage to make this resolution, 'we shall not escape the hand of the Almighty, alive or dead, for even venial sin shall not remain unpunished.'[3] Let us imprint deeply on our souls an abiding horror of venial sin, but particularly: 1st, of that which is most habitual, for it is the disease to which we are most liable that elicits the special attention of the physician; 2dly, that which is the source of all others, since if the root be destroyed the tree must inevitably perish; 3dly, that which leads directly to mortal sin, since, when we are

[1] St. Doroth. 20. [2] 2 Machab. vi. 23. [3] St. Prosper.

really apprehensive of falling into an abyss, we sedulously shun the path which leads thereto. 'He,' says St. Jerome, 'who fears small faults is very far from committing great crimes.' St. Dorotheus says: 'Do not commit venial sin under the pretext of its being such, since it may become mortal, for we pass with the utmost facility from light to great faults.'[1] 'Light faults,' adds St. Gregory, 'always precede great ones, and it is only by degrees that we arrive at the commission of crime.'[2]

2. *Of the care we should take to avoid venial sin.*

It does not suffice that we hate it, we must always avoid it with the utmost care.

This care consists in a firm resolution, a constant vigilance and a prompt resistance joined to great fervour in prayer.

1. The firm resolution to avoid sin supposes in the soul a sincere regret for those which it has already committed. Had we been guilty of but one venial fault we should, after the example of Blessed Rodriguez, 'weep over it during our whole life.'[3] Is such our disposition? What regret do we feel for our sins? What uneasiness do they cause us? What contrition do we conceive for them at the evening examination of conscience, or at that made preparatory to our approaching the sacred Tribunal of Penance to obtain their pardon? Do we instantly deplore the infidelities into which we fall, crying out with David: 'I have sinned;'[4] or with the blind man of the Gospel: 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me;'[5] or else with the publican: 'O God! be merciful to me a sinner'?[6] Have we formed the firm

[1] Serm. [2] St. Greg. Moral. [3] Life of B. Alp. Rodrig.
[4] 2 Kings xii. 13. [5] Mark x. 47. [6] Luke xviii. 13.

and generous resolution to avoid venial sin in future? Have we resolved to guard with special vigilance against some particular fault from one confession to another? Have we renewed this good resolution in our visits to the Blessed Sacrament? How many venial faults have we corrected up to the present time? Woe to us should we convert so salutary a remedy into a poison! An excellent means of cherishing a sincere sorrow for our transgressions, and insuring the fulfilment of our resolutions, is to allow our minds to be deeply penetrated with the heinousness of venial sin which we have just been considering, and to recall the cause of it at the close of our meditation, and also frequently during the day. 'All sin proceeds from some ignorance,'[1] which conceals from us its deformity and malice; therefore, there could be no better shield against relapses than a perfect knowledge and frequent reflections on the dreadful consequences which venial sin entails. We recoil from the aspect of a venomous reptile, because we know its bite is poisonous; but did we understand how subtle and pernicious is the venom with which the least sin infects our soul, we would 'flee from it as from the face of a serpent.'[2] It was his profound knowledge of sin that made St. Edmund of Canterbury say: 'he would cheerfully consent to be cast on a burning pile rather than voluntarily commit even a light fault.'[3] 'We, on the contrary,' says St. John Chrysostom, 'daily fall into venial sin, because we have no zeal to enlighten our souls'[4] with the torch of faith which would discover to us its malice.

2. The strongest resolutions will not guarantee us

[1] St. Thom. 1. 2, q. 77, a. 2.
[2] Ecclus. xxi. 2.
[3] Life of St. Edmund.
[4] Hom.

against so great an evil unless we exercise a perpetual watchfulness not to displease God in any way. We learn from Fr. Maffée's 'Life of St. Ignatius,' that this illustrious servant of God 'observed a constant vigilance over himself, to guard against the illusion of the senses, and dissipation of mind;' and as a man in costly attire treads cautiously on a road saturated with mud and rain, so he took extraordinary precautions to preserve his soul from the smallest stain. St. John Chrysostom admonishes us that 'we have a restless and implacable enemy against whom we must exert exceeding watchfulness if we would elude his snares.'[1]

Let us now examine ourselves. What guard do we keep over our senses and the faculties of our soul? Do we, as St. Macarius advises, turn away our eyes from all that could be suggestive of evil? close our ears to all dangerous discourses? restrain our tongue from vain, idle, and reprehensible words? watch over our heart that it yield not to the instability of its thoughts and desires? If we give free scope to our desires and imaginations, allow full liberty to our senses, above all if we place no restraint on our eyes, no bridle on our tongue, it is not surprising that obstacles arise at every step to impede our spiritual progress. 'Our vices,' says Quintilian, 'derive their vivacity from our eyes;' and St. Gregory Nazianzen adds, 'unhappily our heart but too often obeys their concupiscence.' Our eyes are, as it were, the windows by which death most frequently enters our soul to rob it of the treasure of its virtue.

'The tongue,' says St. James, 'is a fire, a world of iniquity . . . . which defileth the whole body . . . . It is an evil which no man can tame; it is full of deadly

[1] Hom.

poison.'[1] If, therefore, we desire to admit only pure and holy thoughts into our soul, we must (following the advice of St. Jerome) repress the curiosity of our eyes which would drag us into sin; we must 'set a watch before our mouth, and a door round about our lips that our heart incline not to evil words,'[2] foolish mirth, murmurings, detractions, disputes, false reports, lying, or any of the suggestions of Satan.

It is very useful at the close of our meditation, also after confession and communion, to renounce and detest all our faults in anticipation; to foresee the occasions of venial sin, to recall the persons, the places, and the occupations most likely to prove a source of danger to us. This is an infallible preventive to our faults, for it is by seeing the snares which are laid for us that we avoid sin;'[3] 'but the soul which neglects to watch constantly over its heart with fear and self-distrust inevitably succumbs before the arrows of temptation.'[4] 'Therefore it imports us much to anticipate the dangers that we fear and not to engage in the battle till we are sure of conquering!'[5] Let us examine whether we are faithful to this practice.

Do we promptly resist sin the moment it suggests itself? Let us interrogate our conscience. 'Let us search Jerusalem with lamp in hand.'[6] Do we not give a half consent to the temptation? Do we not hesitate before rejecting it? Do we not keep up a secret understanding with it in our heart? Ah, if we have any love left for our soul, if we would win heaven and secure our salvation, let us shun even the shadow of sin; let us fear the danger while it still seems remote; and should the

[1] St. James iii. 6.
[2] Ps. cxl. 3.
[3] St. John Chrys. Homil.
[4] St. Greg. Gt. Explan. Job.
[5] St. Theodore Stud.
[6] St. Sophia i. 12.

enemy present himself, let him find us clothed in the arms of faith. Let us 'crush the head of the serpent and his body will infallibly perish.' He who courageously sustains the first shock of the battle is sure of victory. 'Our strength increases,' says St. Laurence Justinian, 'and God sends us more powerful aid when we resolutely resist temptation the moment we perceive it.' Let us not procrastinate, therefore; a spark neglected may enkindle a great burning, and a shameful fall may follow a slight infidelity. 'A dress,' says St. John Chrysostom, 'once it is torn, is speedily reduced to shreds, if not promptly mended; and a torrent that has broken its dykes swiftly causes a great inundation.'[1] Thus it is with the infernal dragon—let him but obtain by force or fraud an entrance for his head into our heart, and he will soon contrive to introduce his body and make himself master of our soul. This wily serpent enters insidiously and eludes our grasp when we fancy we have captured him. Suffer him but to seize the finger, and soon the whole hand will be swallowed up. Our sole chance of escape lies in a manful resistance to his first assaults. 'But we cannot successfully combat his diabolical suggestions,' says St. Isidore, 'except by a sincere love of God and by fervent and constant prayer.' Prayer is an arsenal provided with irresistible arms wherewith to oppose the enemy, whilst divine love is the furnace whence we draw them glowing to temper them anew.

If not animated by charity, we shall but feebly sustain the combat. 'Unless we attract grace by fervent prayer, in vain shall we endeavour to dissipate our errors and temptations; for our will alone, unaided by God, is

[1] Homil.

unable to gain the victory.'[1] Now this heavenly succour is only granted to prayer. Are we wont, like Judas Machabeus, 'to conjure the Lord of heaven to send His good angel before us for the fear and dread of the greatness of His arm?'[2] Are we accustomed to make acts of charity at stated hours as a preservative against our most habitual and dangerous falls? saying, for instance, when the clock strikes: 'My God, I love Thee above all things; I would rather die than displease Thee by the least venial sin, and by such a sin in particular;' or, you may make the following protestation: 'Yes, Lord, though by a momentary impatience, a little lie, a slight detraction, I could avoid pain, sickness, and death, or the loss of my reputation, though I could thus obtain the love and esteem of men, still I would not commit that sin.' These holy affections are a powerful shield against our weakness.

'Once we love God with our whole heart,' says St. Prosper, 'there shall no longer be anything in us which will obey the suggestions of sin.'

To conclude. Thrice happy shall we be, if our heart be deeply imbued with an abiding horror of venial sin, as it shall then be pure and spotless in the sight of God. Attachment to sin shall not predominate over us, neither shall we have any cause to fear its consequences, if we faithfully follow the four means just indicated for conquering it.

CHAPTER II.

OF TEPIDITY.

TEPIDITY is the ordinary fruit of venial sin, next to which it is, without doubt, the greatest obstacle to solid virtue.

[1] St. Innoc. Pope. [2] 2 Machab. xv. 23.

Even as a lingering illness so far enervates the body as to incapacitate it for the least exertion, so tepidity weakens and arrests the soul in the way of perfection.

To stimulate ourselves to attack so dangerous a disease, and promptly rid our soul of it, let us consider its malice and its baneful effects. We shall next study the marks by which it may be recognised and the remedies by which it may be overcome.

Article I.

Of the malice of tepidity.

1. *The tepid soul resembles the field of the slothful man.*

The irregular affections and frequent faults which each moment inflict new wounds on the tepid soul, liken it to 'the field of the slothful man, all filled with nettles;'[1] and to 'the vineyard of the foolish man, the face of which was covered with thorns; the stone wall' that defended it—that is, interior recollection and the special protection of God—having been 'broken down.'[2] 'As the boar out of the wood, and the wild beast lays waste'[3] and devastates the deserted vineyard, so tepidity effects the most dreadful havoc in the soul of which it has taken possession. It so impairs the germs of virtue that, far from improving with years, it finds itself less virtuous in an advanced age than it was in the days of its youth. Tepid, languishing, sterile soul, well mayest thou be compared to the 'barren fig-tree of the Gospel;' tree, accursed by Jesus Christ Himself, and which 'immediately withered away.'[4] Thou art that ungrateful 'earth that often drinketh in the waters of grace,' but

[1] Prov. xxiv. 30, 31.
[2] Prov. xxiv. 31.
[3] Ps. lxxix. 14.
[4] Matt. xxi. 19.

because it bringeth forth only 'the thorns and briars' of vices, 'it is very near unto a curse.'[1]

Ah! could we but raise the veil which conceals the conscience of the tepid man, we would probably be terrified to see there the 'wicked abominations,' figured by the 'creeping things and living creatures with which Ezechias beheld the Temple filled.'[2] In reality, is not this but too faithful a picture of the false principles by which we seek to stifle the remorse necessarily awakened by our detractions, quarrels, hatred, jealousy, rivalry, pride, murmurings, acrimony, and that self-love which artfully insinuates itself into all our actions?

2. *The life of the tepid man is but a succession of irreligious actions.*

Let us represent to ourselves the wretched state of the tepid Christian in the discharge of the holiest duties of religion. In approaching the Holy Table he presents us with the spectacle of the 'abomination of desolation in the holy place.'[3] His countenance, look, gait, in fine, his whole demeanour, indicate the languor which oppresses his soul. The Cherubim burn with love, the Seraphim tremble with awe, and he meantime assumes an irreverent and careless posture. Devoid of every particle of piety, he amuses himself with vain, puerile, frivolous thoughts at the very moment that the most tremendous mysteries are being wrought, at the moment that he is receiving into his heart the Bread of Angels! Does he approach the Sacrament of Penance, his preparation is so careless and negligent that this same act of reconciliation must be atoned for by a new confession. Faithless soul! ere the lapse of an hour he shall have

[1] Heb. vi. 7, 8. [2] Ezech. viii. 9, 10. [3] Mark xiii. 14.

fallen back into those faults he had promised to amend. His vocal prayers are recited with such precipitation, irreverence, and dissipation, that his only object seems to be to get rid of them, and to attract on himself this malediction of the Royal Prophet: 'May his prayer be turned to sin.'[1] Truly culpable is his conduct in thus provoking the anger of God by the means most adapted to conciliate him. If deterred by the fear of scandal from omitting his pious exercises, he performs them only through custom, human respect, necessity, to save appearances and to deceive others; his soul, meantime, being weary of them.

Thus he acquires a habit of confessing without amendment, communicating without devotion, meditating without fruit, acting without purity of intention, rule, or order, through the whim of the moment, or some equally unchristian motive. Seated at the very source of grace, but as inert as the 'sick man who lay thirty-eight years at the well of Bethsaida,' never is he cured of his spiritual 'infirmity.'[2] The thought of God is irksome to him, he alienates himself from the guidance of Divine Providence. A stranger to himself, he shrinks from investigating the depths of his conscience. Dissipated exteriorly, oblivious of God's presence without being more present to himself, dreading labour, thinking only of self-gratification, repose, and pleasure, he laughs at the idea of venial sin, committing it without anxiety or regret for the most trifling cause, 'for a piece of bread.'[3]

3. *God soon begins to vomit him out of His mouth.*

Leading, as he does, a life full of defects, what wonder is it that the tepid soul exposes itself to an approaching

[1] Ps. cviii. 7. [2] John v. 5. [3] Ezech. xiii. 19.

curse? What wonder that it so disgusts the heart of God that He must soon reject it as something insupportably loathsome? 'Because thou art lukewarm I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth.'[1] A fearful anathema confirmed by the lips of God Himself.

Dastardly slave of tepidity, hearken to this threat. Listen and tremble. God is about to reject thee! God! He who so tenderly seeks out and receives sinners, who seats Himself as a friend at their table, entertains such a disgust for thee that, despite His burning love, He can no longer tolerate thee; He is about to vomit thee out of His mouth! Can we image to ourselves a more frightful picture of the consequences of relaxation in piety? Vomiting fatigues us; it sickens and disgusts us in future with the food which has provoked it. Tepid soul, behold thy portrait! This, according to the striking similitude of Scripture, is a vivid illustration of thy state. Hapless being! thou disgustest the heart of thy God, thou exasperatest His paternal charity against thee, and thou art not terrified! Thy God is about to cast thee off, thou art about to become an object of loathing to Him and the whole celestial court, and thou tremblest not! Thou readest these awful warnings which the mercy of God still vouchsafest to thee, without being impressed or animated to fervour! Thou believest that His words shall be verified, and thou sheddest no tears of repentance; thou abidest in thy tepidity! This very meditation itself thou makest without fruit. Slothful soul! If threats like these fail to arouse thee, what shall be able to do so? Alas! absolute coldness, that is mortal sin itself, though the climax of misfortune, is, in some respects, less to be dreaded than tepidity.

[1] Apoc. iii. 16.

True, mortal sin is, in itself, a greater evil, but very often the effects of tepidity are more pernicious. For this reason it is that God seems to be less apprehensive of the former for us, and exclaims, in the anguish of His heart: 'I would thou wert cold.'[1] Such is the aversion with which a soul enslaved by spiritual languor inspires Him that He consents to see it the victim of mortal sin rather than endure its lukewarmness.

O my soul! renounce thy tepidity even now, recognising as thou dost its danger and its malice. Redeem lost time, renew thy fervour; 'be mindful from whence thou art fallen and do penance, and do the first works. Or else God, to avenge Himself, will come to thee, will move thy candlestick out of its place'[2] and will expel thee for ever from His presence. 'Oh! God of mercy,'[3] 'cast me not away from Thy face.'[4] 'I am the barren fig-tree,'[5] 'the unfruitful vine.'[6] Long since have I deserved to be cut down, to be deprived of the care of the husbandman. But filled with fear at the sight of my ingratitude for all Thy bounty, I firmly purpose to atone for my past tepidity by a uniform and persevering fervour. Thou, my God, 'art a consuming fire;'[7] melt, then, I implore Thee, the ice of my heart, and grant that I may serve Thee with a fervour commensurate with my tardiness in doing so.

Article II.

1. *Of the effects of tepidity.*

1. This spiritual malady is exceedingly difficult of cure. So constant and unvarying is the care required for the extirpation of this baneful vice, that St. Paul gives us but

[1] Apoc. iii. 15. [2] Apoc. ii. 5. [3] 2 Esdras ix. 31. [4] Ps. l. 13. [5] Luke xiii. 7. [6] John xv. 6. [7] Heb. xii. 29.

little hope of its accomplishment. 'It is impossible,' that is, extremely difficult, 'for those who were once illuminated and are fallen away to be renewed again to penance.'[1]

Tepidity is the principle of an almost incurable spiritual disease; because, to cure a malady, it is essential to understand its nature and gravity. Now, the tepid man does not believe himself such; or, at least, he does not fully realise the extent of the evil from which he suffers, since blindness of mind necessarily accompanies tepidity, and a knowledge of his state would be the beginning of fervour. He is in imminent peril and he fancies himself in security; sinful, and he imagines himself innocent; infirm, and he believes himself robust. He has no idea of recurring to remedies. He still each day performs his exercises of piety, but he does so mechanically; he occasionally executes some good, but it is done imperfectly, and, deceived by this illusive appearance of virtue, he perceives not the depth of his misery. A thought of the necessity of extricating himself from it never even dawns upon him, and hence the difficulty of his cure.

2. But even though the tepid man should desire to regain his fervour, his disease is such that it renders the most wholesome food prejudicial. Meditations, examens, confessions, retreats, all spiritual exercises, are performed so slothfully by him that these powerful helps of grace, instead of producing fruit, prove detrimental to him. He incites others to the practice of those virtues which are wanting to himself, preserving them by his admonitions from the vices which dishonour his own soul, and prescribing spiritual remedies for them from which, however, personally he derives no benefit. Immovable as a fingerpost on the roadside, he points out the way but

[1] Heb. vi. 4. 6.

does not follow it; being all the more culpable in that he knows the paths of fervour but will not walk on them.

St. Bernard felt convinced that the conversion of a sinner, however steeped in guilt, presented less obstacles than did that of a tepid religious. The sight of a crucifix, the thought of death, judgment, or the eternal pains of hell, have often moved obdurate sinners to repentance; whilst the tepid man, on the contrary, accustomed to meditate lightly and superficially on these great truths, is as little affected by them as the constant spectators of death are touched by the convulsive struggles of the dying.

3. A last and efficacious remedy for this evil would be a special grace capable of enabling him to shake off his spiritual torpor; but the sloth of which he is the slave renders even this abortive.

Intoxicated by his passions, rarely recollected, he disobeys the movements of the Holy Ghost, turns a deaf ear to the inspirations of grace, and voluntarily continues in his tepidity. Is it then to be wondered at that God ceases His importunities and delivers him up to his unhappy blindness!

More than this: the good effected by the tepid man is badly done. Sinning almost incessantly, he deprives himself of the special favours and visits of the Almighty. Now and then a ray of heavenly light illumines the obscurity of his mind and thaws his frozen heart, but these favours are evanescent, and frequently tepidity lasts for life.

My God! who would not dread this fearful vice? However, I will not despair, for 'all things are possible to him that believeth.'[1] O Jesus! Thou who didst restore

[1] Mark ix. 22.

Lazarus to life, when his body had already become a prey to the corruption of the tomb, I recur to Thee with unbounded confidence. 'Thou camest to send fire on earth, and what wouldst Thou but that it be kindled?'[1] Inflame my heart with its vivifying warmth, and grant that it may never be extinguished.

2. *Tepidity exposes the soul to the danger of mortal sin.*

The second effect of tepidity is to expose us to the proximate danger of mortal sin. The tepid man, accustomed to his defects, commits venial sin without scruple; he reflects but rarely, and then apathetically, on the grievousness of mortal sin and the motives for avoiding it; the horror which he should have of this sin insensibly diminishes till his conscience no longer fears it. He permits his imagination to amuse itself with unchaste thoughts, allows a dangerous liberty to his senses, dallies with temptation, rashly hesitating between resistance and consent till he has even cause to doubt whether he has not taken pleasure in it. He forms for himself lax principles, or rather he 'makes vain excuses for his sins.'[2] At length, assailed by some more than ordinarily violent temptation, he falls into the gulf of mortal sin. Oh! could we but catch a glimpse of those souls confined within the prisons of purgatory and hell; could the voice of their wailings reach us, how many should we not hear cursing their tepidity and verifying amid groans of anguish the threats of Holy Writ. 'He that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little.'[3] But who so reckless of little things as the tepid soul? If, as St. Jerome remarks, sooner or later we must perish in the danger we have long courted, what must be the

[1] Luke xii. 49. [2] Ps. cxl. 4. [3] Eccli. xix. 1.

fate of the tepid man, walking as he habitually does along the edge of the precipice? who, if not he, incurs the risk of being lost for ever? Here let us recall the awful apostasy of the Prince of the Apostles. Having accompanied the Redeemer to the Garden of Olives, Peter yielded to tepidity. Neglecting prayer, he slept. When the soldier led away the Saviour, the Apostle followed Him, it is true, but it was 'afar off,'[1] and mingling with the servants of the High Priest, he approached the fire, for 'it was cold;'[2] but far more to be dreaded was the mortal chill which had fallen on Peter's heart. Before the cock crowed twice he had thrice denied his Master. Thus it was that the odious vice of tepidity overthrew the strongest pillar of the Church.

Christian soul, beware! your lethargy indulged in may lead you on to mortal sin, and in this state you possibly may die!

Lord, my God! Look on me in Thy great mercy, withdraw me from this wretched state, 'that I may never sleep in death.'[3]

3. *It exposes us to an irreligious death.*

Death is the echo of life. A holy death after a tepid life would be a kind of miracle.

At the approach of death the tepid man has no desire of heaven; his heart is altogether earthly, he fears death which is about to tear him away from all that he loves; he is filled with dismay, should they venture to broach to him the subject of his approaching dissolution. He feels his strength decaying, the sands of life are ebbing fast, his agony is close at hand, and yet he deludes himself into the belief that he has still a long career before

[1] Matt. xxvi. 58. [2] John xviii. 18. [3] Ps. xii. 4.

him. Thus, at the supreme moment, with life eluding his grasp and his soul hovering on the confines of eternity, instead of trying to merit a holy death, he is wholly occupied in seeking means for his restoration. The pains incidental to his disease are borne with an impatience which might be looked for in a heathen, to whom the name and sufferings of Jesus Christ were utter strangers, because self-love, personal comfort, and sensual gratification have been the constant subjects of his thoughts. The depraved inclinations of his heart which he has never sought to curb now tyrannise over him more violently than ever. Everything displeases, annoys, is insupportable to him. The priest suggests holy affections; but devoid, as he long has been, of all religious sentiments, he cannot, suffering as he is in mind and body, follow or even understand his admonitions.

He has habituated himself to indifference in the discharge of all his religious duties: can it be hoped that any he may now perform will be supernatural or meritorious?

It is appalling to witness the listlessness and indevotion with which he prepares himself for the last sacraments, if, indeed, in punishment of his tepidity, a sudden death do not deprive him of them. He makes his confession languidly. With the apathy of a heretic he receives into his heart the Lamb of God, who is so soon to be his judge and most formidable adversary. He is anointed with the holy oil, but he is abstracted or asleep. He is supinely indifferent to what is taking place around him. And yet, these are the last, the most powerful helps that shall be granted to him: with what fervour, therefore, should he not receive them, particularly at this all-decisive moment!

And now behold him in his agony. Callous to the things of heaven and yet agitated by remorse of conscience, terrified for the past, he trembles for the future. Finally he expires, leaving the lookers-on but too just grounds for uneasiness. He appears before the judgment-seat of God, to be precipitated, if not into hell, at least into the fires of purgatory, there to suffer multiform and excruciating tortures, it may be, for long years.

O my God! I shudder with horror at the contemplation of the fate to which tepidity has been hurrying me on. Alas! I have served Thee, O King of kings, with a negligence and sloth which the last of men would not tolerate in one of his servants. I have been guilty of an inattention at prayer, which I would not dream of indulging in conversing with my friends. I have repaid by coldness the ardent love which attracts Thee to me in the Blessed Eucharist, and Thy promise of granting most precious graces in this adorable Sacrament to all who love Thee. Thou art the Lord of lords, who standest in need of no one, and yet Thou loadest me with benefits. Like a tender mother Thou claspest me to Thy bosom. Thou co-operatest in all my actions, not one of which I could perform without Thine aid; and all these gifts are the effects of Thy pure, gratuitous, unmerited love! But, oh, base ingratitude! I remain cold and languishing in Thy service, whilst I cheerfully consume my strength in useless labours, in a foolish love of creatures. But I deeply lament my obduracy, O my God, and am firmly resolved that henceforth every moment of my life, every pulsation of my heart, shall be consecrated to Thee alone.

Article III.

Of the marks and remedies of tepidity.

Tepidity is an offspring and, as it were, a branch of sloth. 'Sloth,' says St. Thomas, 'is a species of disgust for virtue; it is a languor of soul which causes it to neglect its spiritual welfare; a sadness which oppresses and dejects the heart of man, deprives him, so to speak, of the power of doing good,'[1] and renders pious exercises and acts of virtue fatiguing and insipid to him.

'Tepidity,' say the holy Fathers, 'is a profound lethargy which arrests its victims on the road to perfection; a fever which gradually undermines the soul and incapacitates it for devotion.

1. *Of the marks of tepidity.*

They are all delineated by St. Bernard in the following description of a tepid soul. 'There are,' says he, 'in religion, certain slothful and pusillanimous souls, who succumb under the burden of their duty, submit only to the rod of correction, and show occasional and uncertain signs of recollection and compunction. The flesh and the senses engross all their thoughts; their obedience is not the result of faith, their conversations are indiscreet, they pray without attention; they are undeterred by the fear of hell and the scandal of their bad example, they cast off the yoke of discipline and in a great degree the empire of reason; their conduct, in a word, is a guilty license and a perpetual scandal.' Cassian had already given the chief characteristics of this vice. 'Tepid religious,' says he, 'hate and fear retreat, tire of their cell, despise their brethren, labour slothfully,

[1] St. Thom. 2. 2, q. 35, a. 1.

frequently quit their monastery, are the slaves of sensuality, frequent society, engage in secular business, love idle conversations, are displeased at the charitable admonitions given them, and avail themselves of every pretext for evading them; finally, they bear the yoke of discipline reluctantly, entertain an inordinate attachment for their country and relatives, and indulge in dangerous familiarities.'[1] Examine yourself seriously and impartially, and see whether you recognise in yourself any of these marks.

1. What is your devotion at prayer and at the Holy Sacrifice, whether as assistant or celebrant thereat? In what manner do you make your general and particular examen? Are you faithful in calling yourself to an account for all your thoughts, words, and actions? With what faith and attention do you recite your vocal prayers, particularly the Divine Office? With what fervour do you approach the holy sacraments of Penance and Communion? If you perform these duties negligently and through routine, you are undoubtedly of the number of those tepid souls whom God threatens to reject.

2. Have you habitually regulated your conduct by certain lax principles, by the aid of which you endeavour to stifle your remorse? For example, have you not said, I am no longer a novice? Why should not so-and-so be permitted to me as well as to others? Must not some allowance be made for youth? Why ruin one's health by voluntary mortifications? It is better to be wrong with the many than right alone. Religious perfection is only a pious chimera. It is well to court the favour of the great who, should I succeed in pleasing them, may prefer me to my equals. Each one should

[1] Conf. 22.

look after his own interests and not confide them to others. For my part, I will accept of no employments which are likely to be prejudicial to my amusement or aggrandisement; these I will willingly cede to others. There can be no surer proof than this of your being thoroughly tepid.

3. Are you wont to yield to sloth? Do you indulge in too much sleep? Do you study your ease and self-gratification? Are you not too fastidious with regard to food, seeking the gratification of your palate and senses on all occasions? Once more, should such immortification be the rule of your conduct, it is another proof that you are tepid, you are the victim of a most dangerous disease, and will require a most skilful and enlightened physician to prescribe efficacious remedies for you.

Amongst those remedies the principal are an undeviating fidelity to daily meditation, spiritual reading, and the habit of devoting one day of each month to retreat.

I name these the *principal* remedies because there are also others which are very beneficial, as, for example, to frequent the society of the most fervent, and avoid that of the tepid, edifying conversations, seclusion from the world, the practice of mortifications, great zeal in daily visiting the Blessed Sacrament, and, lastly, the pious custom of making aspirations, particularly when the clock strikes. I merely glance at these last, in order more fully to develop the three first, which I regard as the most efficacious and important.

2. *Of the remedies for tepidity.*

If the total abandonment of prayer, or even a mere inconsistency in this holy exercise, is one of the chief

sources of tepidity, so a generous and persevering performance of it is the most excellent and certain means of extirpating this vice. Prayer is as indispensable for the preservation of fervour as food is for the life of the body. This simile is beautifully expressed by St. Augustine, who says: 'As material food constitutes the sustenance of the body, so a spirit of prayer and union with God is the food and life of the interior man.'[1] And, to remove all doubt of the efficacy and importance of meditation, he adds: 'A reasonable soul cannot live any other life than that which it draws from its communion with God in prayer.'[2]

Here, then, we have an irrefragable authority for the absolute necessity for this holy exercise. It is clear that as the soul derives its life from its communings with God in prayer, it must expose itself to inevitable shipwreck the moment it deprives itself of this spiritual nutriment. The Royal Prophet assures us of his personal experience of this truth. 'My heart,' says he, 'is withered because I forgot to eat my bread.'[3] Mark well the words—as soon as he ceased to take his food his heart withered! What the sinews are to the limbs, what an invigorating beverage is to the fainting heart, what blood is to the body, such is meditation to the soul, and without it there is 'no means left of advancing in the spiritual life.'[4]

Besides, reason renders the same testimony, for it is impossible to preserve the fervour of our soul in all its vigour unless our mind meditates frequently on the eternal truths, and our will excites itself to the constant practice of them. Now, we accomplish this twofold exercise of the mind and will by mental prayer, which

[1] Serm. [2] Serm. [3] Ps. ci. 5. [4] St. Aug. Treat. on St. John.

St. Ambrose styles on this account 'the substantial food of our soul.' Let us acknowledge, therefore, that meditation is an equally essential and potent remedy against tepidity. Let us now examine whether we have devoted to meditation the full time prescribed for it. Have we made it in a respectful posture, with attention and fervour? Devoted sufficient time and care to its preparation? Made a short review at its close of the way in which we have performed it, and the fruit we have derived from it? Recalled frequently during the day the thought selected by us for the spiritual bouquet? We should lose no time in correcting whatever defects we may observe in any of these points. For the rest, this matter is so important that we shall resume and treat of it at greater length in the second part of this work. We have said that spiritual reading is another powerful antidote against tepidity. Let us see with what assiduity we apply ourselves to it. Have we not, by a neglect of it, exposed ourselves to the danger of falling into or continuing in tepidity? Have we devoted at least a quarter of an hour to it daily? The Holy Scriptures, say the Fathers, are faithful mirrors in which the soul may, without fear of illusion, discover the stains it has contracted, and from which it should purify itself. They are letters from our heavenly country, written by the finger of God, containing the true principles and solid maxims of sanctity; friendly monitors which freely reprehend our vices; skilful physicians which teach us the most effectual remedies for our spiritual maladies. In a word, the reading of good books provides us with excellent weapons against temptation, renews the fervour of the tepid, augments the charity of the just, confirms the constancy of the perfect, and renders the practice of

meditation easy and profitable to us. St. Paul makes it strictly obligatory on Timothy: 'Attend unto reading;'[1] and St. Jerome exhorts Celantia to it: 'I advise and recommend above all things, I even earnestly entreat you, to nourish your soul assiduously with spiritual reading: it is the surest means of conducting you to the perfection of justice.'[2] But that this exercise may be profitable to us, we should understand how to make a suitable selection of books and to pursue a good method of reading. The same book does not suit all persons, nor is it even adapted to the same individual under all circumstances. A choice, therefore, is absolutely essential. We should prefer those which abound more in unction than in erudition; those which are more calculated to inflame the heart and determine the will than to gratify curiosity; those most in accordance with our actual wants, and which most forcibly inculcate the mortification of the senses, hatred of vice, and love of virtue. 'The object of a spiritual lecture is not to make us more learned, but to make us live better; not to enable us to speak more eloquently, but to help us to advance more rapidly in perfection. In effect, what avails it to learn one's duty and not to do it?'[3] For this reason I do not approve of spending the time destined for spiritual reading in making extracts or taking notes, as this would degrade it to a study; it would be preferring the letter to the spirit. We should, on the contrary, read in order to become holy rather than learned, for as Hugh of St. Victor remarks: 'A pious lecture should not be an object of study for the Christian philosopher, but an exhortation to virtue.'

This exercise cannot fail to be profitable to us if we

[1] 1 Tim. iv. 13. [2] Letter. [3] Letter to Celantia.

make it with attention, a religious spirit, and perseverance. St. Augustine demands attention to reading, and shows its importance in his letter to Demetrius: 'You shall have made a good use of spiritual reading,' says he, 'if it is a sincere mirror in which your soul, beholding itself, endeavours to efface the stains which it discovers, and to enhance the beauty of the virtues with which grace has adorned it.' We should read spiritual books carefully and attentively, not hastily or superficially. We should pause occasionally on those truths which make most impression on us, the better to remember the holy lessons they convey. Above all, we should take care to make practical resolutions during the lecture, in accordance with the good thoughts it suggests, such as to perform such and such an act of virtue, to correct such or such a defect, and to acquit ourselves more faithfully of the obligations of our state or employment.

What testimony does our conscience give on this matter? Has our lecture, penetrating our soul like a soft-refreshing dew, fructified our good desires? or has it, like an impetuous torrent, dashed rapidly through our minds without leaving any trace of it behind? Do we reflect from time to time on the lessons it imparts, for the purpose of reducing them to practice? Do we not resemble 'a man who, beholding his own countenance in a glass, goes away, and presently forgets what sort of man he is?'[1] Let us, at least, who read these lines, avoid such culpable carelessness. The religious spirit which ought to pervade our spiritual reading should be manifested exteriorly by the recollection and gravity of our deportment. 'Read the Holy Scripture,'

[1] James i. 23, 24.

says St. Augustine, 'remembering that it is the Word of God;'[1] 'it is a letter from our country,'[2] adds St. Bernard; 'and in the divine pages of the Sacred Book,' subjoins St. Ambrose, 'it is Jesus Christ who speaks to us.' Is it not evident that so holy a lecture should be made in a respectful posture, with the heart elevated to God, and the soul permeated with holy affections and desires?

Our lecture must be characterised by perseverance both as to time and method.

Let us not emulate the inconstancy of the butterfly, flitting lightly from page to page, and from book to book, without gathering fruit from any. Never lay a book aside till you have read it through, otherwise your lecture will only be a source of distraction to you. We should regulate the hour at which we are to make and the length of time we are to spend at it every day without exception. We should, at least, devote a quarter of an hour to it, and, if possible, make it immediately after meditation. Such is the assiduity required by St. Jerome to this exercise, that, writing to St. Paula, he says: 'Do not lay down the Holy Book till overcome by sleep, and then let your head rest on the sacred pages.'[3] However, this advice must not be followed literally, for the same doctor teaches that, 'an excessive love of reading may prove a source of danger by inducing satiety and disgust.' Writing to Eustochium, he says: 'Read with moderation, and let it not be weariness, but the rule you have imposed upon yourself, which shall cause you to lay down the Book.'

With what attention, devotion, and perseverance do we purpose making our spiritual lecture in future? For

[1] Letter. [2] Sermon. [3] Letter.

what length of time, and at what hour, will we make it? Finally, what advantage do we propose to reap from this remedy against tepidity? The Fathers place this exercise on an equality with meditation, and even give it the preference over the hearing of the word of God, naming it the nourishment, light, and life of the soul. Our holy founder, St. Ignatius, advises, nay, prescribes it to us as a duty of the utmost importance. The masters of the spiritual life, taught by constant experience, recommend a day's retreat every month as a very efficient means for conquering tepidity, and acquiring fervour. Should we think well of adopting this advice, we must arrange beforehand the day most convenient for this purpose.

Two hours will be sufficient to devote to it, one being given to the usual morning meditation, and the other divided between the examen, which should be made on the eve, and the consideration, which should be made on the day itself. God will amply indemnify us for these two hours taken from our ordinary occupations by the success with which He will bless our undertakings, and the signal graces with which He will enrich our souls. Let us not, therefore, be so inimical to our eternal interests and the glory of God as to refuse a few brief moments to our spiritual welfare, we who waste whole months and years on our material wants, and even on nonsensical trifles. As I intend to revert to this subject in the second part of this work, I shall not insist further on it here. I will barely add that generous and voluntary corporal mortification is another very efficacious remedy for tepidity and a very powerful weapon against the demon of sloth. However, as I am addressing tepid souls, whom the mere mention of morti-

fication fills with dismay, I will not venture to broach this subject.

To conclude, I am fully persuaded that the faithful observance of the rules just indicated will enable us to triumph over tepidity, and soon make us formidable to hell by our fervour. Let us, then, avail ourselves of them, and soon every vestige of this odious vice shall vanish.

CHAPTER III.

OF THE ABUSE OF GRACE.

GRACE is the nutriment of the soul, just as material food is the aliment of the body; and as we expose ourselves to certain death by obstinately refusing all food, so likewise by the neglect or rejection of grace we expose our virtue to the inevitable danger of shipwreck. No, it our understanding be not illumined by heavenly light, if our will be not animated by the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, it shall be utterly impossible for us to make the least progress in perfection. It is a certain truth that abuse of grace is a very material obstacle to sanctity.

This chapter shall be devoted to the consideration of the abuse of grace and the punishment awaiting it. We shall afterwards give the rules for the discernment of spirits, and lastly, we shall adduce some powerful incentives for corresponding with the inspirations of grace.

ARTICLE I.

Of the abuse of grace.

1. *The need in which we stand of grace.*

Without grace it is impossible for us to acquire any merit in the order of salvation.

This is a truth of the Catholic faith, defined by the Church against the Pelagians and semi-Pelagians.[1] It rests on the Oracle of Jesus Christ, 'without me,' that is, unless my grace incite you to good, 'you can do nothing,'[2] meritorious of eternal life. The Apostle of the nations inculcates the same thing to the Philippians. 'It is God,' says he, 'who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish according to His good pleasure,'[3] and to the Corinthians he adds, 'we are not sufficient to think anything of ourselves as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.'[4] According to the invariable interpretation given by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church to these words of the Apostle, man is incapable of commencing, performing, or even willing anything superior to nature unless he be prevented by interior grace. St. Augustine adds that, 'deprived of this grace, we could not of ourselves either pray to obtain it or prepare our soul for its reception,' so great and absolute is the need in which we stand of the assistance of God! To refuse it, then, when He offers it, is to reject with a lamentable rashness an indispensable means of performing our actions meritoriously. Fool that you are! in resisting the inspirations of grace, you refuse the key of heaven which is offered you; you squander a talent which is the only equivalent for an immortal crown; you throw away a diamond which alone could purchase for you the everlasting possession of God. And you laugh! you laugh, you who so bitterly bewail the loss of a trifling gain. But the day will come when you shall shed burning tears over this criminal abuse of grace, when you shall cry out in the anguish of your soul, 'Alas! when I could I would not!'

[1] 2 Counc. of Orange, Can. 5.
[2] John xv. 5.
[3] 2 Philip. ii. 13.
[4] 2 Cor. iii. 5.

We are aware that of all those who have attained the years of discretion, not one shall be saved unless he bring forth works worthy of salvation. We are likewise aware that without special help from God such works are impossible. We believe these truths of which the word of God is the guarantee; and yet through sloth, levity, and without even the excuse of self-interest, we neglect the only stay of our weakness, we disdainfully refuse the aid which God offers to us, and ungratefully repel the loving violence of His mercy. Such conduct cannot fail to wound this tender Father in the apple of the eye, and dry up, in our regard, the source of grace, exhaustless as it is. 'Father of lights,'[1] what have I done in resisting Thy inspirations? I was seated 'in the dark places, and in the shadow of death,'[2] and I shut my eyes to the only light that could have dispelled this fatal obscurity. Struck with a horrible wound 'from the sole of the foot even to the top of the head,'[3] I have refused the only remedy which could have healed me. Wretched that I am! I have despised a ray of heavenly glory, the price of the precious Blood of Jesus Christ, the pledge of a happy eternity. Ah! Lord, I repent; grant, my God, that I may at least correspond with that which Thou now bestowest on me, and which may perhaps be the last.

2. *On the excellence of grace.*

There is nothing comparable to the dignity and excellence of grace. It is a good which, after the Beatific Vision, exceeds in value all that is not God. Grace is the price of the labours, sufferings, and death of Jesus Christ. It commences, augments, and crowns our merits;

[1] James i. 17. [2] Ps. lxxxvii. 7. [3] Job ii. 7.

finally, it is the seed of eternal glory, since every time the just man, co-operating with its holy inspirations, performs an act of supernatural virtue, he acquires a new degree of sanctifying grace, together with the title to a new degree of immutable happiness. Each ray of this light, penetrating into our heart, deposits there the germ and pledge of an eternal and incomprehensible felicity.

Compare with it all earthly greatness, the diadems of kings, the pomp of the greatest monarchs; add, if you will, the value of the most costly metals and the untold treasures which the earth and sea contain within their bosoms; unite to them the wonders of nature, the matchless magnificence of the aurora, the brightness of the sun, the brilliant splendour of the stars, and you will find that one emanation of grace, one inspiration of the Holy Ghost, is infinitely more estimable and desirable than all these.

Could the damned, by the endurance of a thousand hells, procure but a single one of the countless graces which we so recklessly squander, they would gladly purchase it at that price. And we, miserable that we are, notwithstanding our pressing need of the divine assistance, far from desiring, almost spurn it from us, and obstinately evade and resist its solicitations. Oh, ye heavens, be astonished! it is not the untaught child of the desert, ignorant of the truths of faith, who thus repulses the visits of the Holy Spirit. No; it is Christians, religious even, 'nourished up in the words of faith,'[1] instructed in the necessity of grace and its inappreciable value. But, woe to us! if we only begin to comprehend its value when it has for ever eluded our grasp.

[1] 1 Tim. iv. 6.

O Divine Jesus! like the hapless traveller 'fallen on the road to Jericho into the hands of robbers, whom they wounded and left half dead;'[1] or the blind man 'seated on the wayside'[2] of justice, but who 'sees not the light of heaven,'[3] I ignore my misery; and whilst Thou, with love unparalleled, hourly offerest me Thy grace, purchased at the infinite price of Thy Blood, whilst Thou appliest it as a soothing balm to my wounds and a sight-giving unguent to my eyes, I rudely push aside the hand which fain would heal me, choosing to bear till death the degrading marks of my wretched infatuation.

My God, I am filled with confusion at my ungrateful resistance to Thy calls. Do Thou, who 'art clothed in light,'[4] 'enlighten my eyes,'[5] that I may see and understand the incomparable excellence of Thy grace. Grant 'that I may prefer it before kingdoms and thrones, and esteem riches as nothing in comparison of it.' Grant me fully to realise that 'gold in comparison of it is as a little sand, and silver in respect of it shall be counted as clay.'[6]

3. *Superabundance and efficacy of grace.*

God grants us great and numberless graces, such as our vocation to the faith and the religious state; our election to the dignity of the priesthood, to the guidance of souls, the novitiate, the great annual and the little intermediary retreats, the frequentation of the Divine Mysteries, and the fruit they have the power to produce in our souls. These are a few of the favours lavished on us by the divine bounty. But in what countless other ways does not God manifest His love! Every morning

[1] Luke x. 30. [2] Luke xviii. 35. [3] Tob. v. 12.
[4] Ps. ciii. 2. [5] Ps. xii. 4. [6] Wisd. vii. 8.

the Holy Sacrifice is offered for us at which we may assist; pious exhortations, edifying examples, examen of conscience, spiritual lectures, and holy inspirations recurring almost every moment, are so many choice and continuous graces.

These graces are efficacious both in themselves and in their appropriateness to our wants. Bestowed with the same profusion on others more faithful, they would have caused them to become great saints; they would even have more than sufficed to win back the greatest sinners to God; but in us they are unproductive, because we ungratefully and wantonly reject them. And yet, is not the rejection of such copious, efficacious, and continual graces, together with the little esteem we have for them, a criminal aggravation of their abuse? 'Wo to thee, Corozain! wo to thee, Bethsaida!' wo to thee, religious! 'for if the mighty works that have been wrought in thee had been wrought'[1] in others, they would have attained to high perfection. On the last day infidels and heretics 'shall come from the east and the west.'[2] Those who were thy disciples, thy penitents, thy auditors, those whom thou hast animated to a faithful correspondence with grace, shall also come; they shall come to accuse thee of thy own culpable contempt of it. The Blood of Jesus Christ, shed in vain since thou hast allowed so many interior lights, so many holy inspirations purchased by it to pass unheeded, shall also invoke vengeance upon thee. Unfortunate soul! what answer shalt thou make to the Sovereign Judge when, in presence of the entire universe, He will sustain His cause against thee by this terrible interpellation: 'Inhabitants of' the heavenly 'Jerusalem! judge between me and my

[1] Luke x. 13. [2] Matt. viii. 11.

vineyard'—between me and this soul. Tell me 'what is there that I ought to do more for my vineyard that I have not done to it?' After so many cares lavished upon it, had I not a right to 'expect that it should bring forth grapes, and it hath brought forth only wild grapes.'[1] In return for so many labours, fatigues, and sufferings, this ungrateful vineyard yields me only briars and thorns. Once more, unhappy soul, what reply shalt thou make to those reproaches? 'O Lord, enter not into judgment with Thy servant.'[2] I confess, that my soul, like the barren fig-tree of the Gospel, has been tended with unceasing solicitude, refreshed with the dew of heaven, constantly exposed to the rays of the Sun of Justice, and like it, too, it has been unproductive. But, my God, I have strayed from Thee long enough; may I now, at least, cease to resist Thee. Do not yet begin to punish me. 'Give to Thy servant an understanding heart,'[3] 'that he receive not Thy grace in vain.'[4] Prepare my soul for this divine seed, that, 'falling into good ground, it may spring up there, and yield fruit a hundredfold.'[5]

Article II.

1. *Of the chastisements with which God avenges the abuse of grace.*

God frequently punishes the abuse of sufficient grace by the subtraction of such as is efficacious.

Now, of all the chastisements He could inflict this is the most dire, the most just, and the most ordinary.

1. The subtraction of grace is the most terrible chastisement of its abuse. There is no greater misfortune, nor anything so much to be dreaded as that which tends

[1] Isaias v. 4. [2] Ps. cxlii. 2. [3] 3 Kings iii. 9.
[4] 2 Cor vi. 1. [5] Luke viii. 8.

to alienate us from God, the Sovereign Good, and to subject us to the sovereign evil—sin and hell. Now, this is the deplorable effect of the subtraction of efficacious grace. By a special ordinance of the Almighty this grace is so absolutely necessary for the working out of our salvation, that without it it would be equally impossible for us to possess God or to escape hell. It is true that we could be saved with purely sufficient grace, but, accustomed as we are to an unworthy resistance to it, and weakened by these very infidelities, we are in imminent danger of continuing in this road of perdition, and of thus dying in sin and being lost eternally. The first effect, therefore, of the subtraction of grace is that it removes us from God, our Sovereign Good, and subjects us to the sovereign evil, sin; consequently it is the most awful punishment God can inflict in this life. Furthermore, the misfortune of dying in mortal sin, which is indisputably the greatest that can befall us, is itself but the final rejection of efficacious grace, of the grace which would enable the soul to conceive sentiments of true compunction and charity, and thus recover the friendship of its Creator. The subtraction of grace is, I repeat, the direst penalty of its abuse. Let us appeal to the judgment of the truly wise, those enlightened and guided by faith, and we shall learn that there can be no more awful punishment than that which tends to render the sinner more obdurate in his guilt, blinds his understanding so far as to prevent his discerning his danger, captivates his will so as to divest it of the power of even desiring to break its fetters, deprives him of the best means of doing penance, and levels and abridges the path to vice. And yet, such are the bitter fruits of the privation of the interior lights and inspirations of efficacious grace.

When the Almighty allows us to suffer opprobrium, persecution, sickness, etc., it is a punishment, it is true; but it is not unmitigated, since in these instances His only object is to wean us from sin and attach us to Himself. In inflicting these trials He acts not as a judge but as a father who, in the chastisement of the sin, proposes to himself the conversion of the sinner. But when He delivers up our understanding to blindness, permits our will to become hardened in its own malice, refuses us the lights that would discover to us the odium of vice, and withholds the inspirations which would induce us to detest it; 'when,' says St. Augustine, 'He punishes our illicit pleasures by a humiliating blindness, and abandons us to the desires of our heart and ignominious passions,'[1] then it is that His fury is let loose 'as a bear that is robbed of her whelps,'[2] that the wrath of an omnipotent God strikes us with 'an incurable wound,'[3] 'with the wound of an enemy, with a cruel chastisement,'[4] and so awful as to expend all the rigours of divine justice which it is possible to inflict in this life. Oh, truly terrible revenge! 'O God, rebuke me not in Thy indignation,'[5] here cut, here burn, but withdraw not Thy grace from me.

2. *The subtraction of grace is a just and merited chastisement.*

The subtraction of grace is, on the part of God, an equitable vengeance exercised by Him against the sinner. Grace is the pledge of the love of the heavenly Bridegroom who remains at the door of your heart, knocking, entreating, tenderly imploring admittance. But you do

[1] On Epist to Rom. [2] Osee xiii. 8. [3] Isaias xiv. 6.
[4] Jerem. xxx. 14. [5] Ps. vi. 2.

not hearken to His voice, you turn a deaf ear to His pleadings, you refuse Him entrance. Tired of knocking and finding Himself despised, He at length ceases His importunities, He retires. What could be more just? Grace is a burning and shining light with which God desires to enlighten your mind and inflame your heart; but you close the eyes of your soul, you seek darkness, and like the wild owl you shun light and warmth. The Sun of Justice, finding you constantly rebellious to His divine influences, at length withdraws His rays. He ceases to shine for you. What could be more just? Grace is an inestimable treasure, a pearl of the crown of Jesus Christ, the pledge of eternal life. God lovingly offers it to you, He urges, He insists on your acceptance of it, presenting it anew after reiterated refusals. You despise this gift, you disdain this priceless pearl, you fling it from you as though it were a worthless snow-flake. The Almighty thus repeatedly repelled ceases His solicitations. Who can charge Him with injustice in so doing? Oh, avenging God! this chastisement is but too just, and I, alas! have a thousand times merited it; with the faithless Jerusalem whose children Thou didst so often desire to collect, 'as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings'[1] have I resisted Thee. What grounds have I not to apprehend lest 'my house' that is my soul, 'shall be left to me desolate'?[2] Deeply penetrated with the thought of this awful chastisement and the fear of Thy justice, I cast myself into the arms of Thy mercy, imploring forgiveness and purposing amendment. Chastise me as Thou wilt, provided only Thou withdraw not Thy grace from me.

[1] Matt. xxiii. 37. [2] Ibid. 38.

3. *The subtraction of grace is the ordinary punishment of its abuse.*

God ordinarily withdraws His grace from him who abuses it.

Moses, David, the Prophets, all the sacred writers, incessantly repeat this threat of the subtraction of grace. 'I let them go according to the desires of their heart, they shall walk in their own inventions;'[1] 'He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,'[2] 'that seeing they may not perceive, and hearing they may not understand.'[3] 'The kingdom of God shall be taken from you.'[4] In a word, the whole Scripture abounds in these awful denunciations, whilst myriad examples occur both in the new and old law illustrating that the withdrawal of efficacious grace is a frequent and ordinary punishment of its abuse. Alas! how common is it even in our own times! We are often astonished that God, from whom nothing is concealed, bears so patiently the tepidity and carelessness with which so many acquit themselves of their duty, notwithstanding all the helps they receive.

We are amazed at His tolerating so many whose dissolute and shameful lives are an indelible disgrace to their family and friends and a scandal to strangers. 'Ah!' says St. Augustine, 'God punishes them with a secret chastisement, which is the more severe in that it is more secret, by withdrawing from them His graces and allowing them to sleep tranquilly in their tepidity.'

Owing to this fatal and secret chastisement, those who formerly shuddered at the very shadow of sin now regard as trifles, thoughts, looks, and other dangerous liberties.

[1] Ps. lxxx. 13.
[2] John xii. 40.
[3] Mark iv. 12.
[4] Matt. xxi. 43.

Too tender friendships, familiarities, aversions, hatreds, detractions, murmurs, anger, etc., they term venial offences, though there is but too much reason to fear that they are so many mortal sins. The remorse awakened by gross neglect of their employments or violation of their vows they regard as vain scrupulosity. They form for themselves certain lax principles by the aid of which they endeavour to deceive themselves and drown the voice of conscience. Those hearts, once so docile to the attractions of virtue, so susceptible to holy impressions, now frozen and hard as adamant, are callous alike to the remembrance of their last end, the judgments of God, and the duties of religion.

Nothing moves them, nothing can effect their cure. Would to God that a daily experience did not teach us that this chastisement is but too usual even in religious communities. How often does not the prophet's lamentation resound in our ear. Alas! 'how is the gold become dim, the finest colour changed! They that were brought up in scarlet have embraced dung. Her Nazarites were whiter than snow, how is their face now made blacker than coals!'[1] Those fearful falls, those thrilling shipwrecks in virtue, the abandonment of a holy vocation frequently followed by apostasy and an absolute loss of faith, are so many instances illustrative of the subtraction of divine grace from which the Almighty would have us take salutary warning. Let us fathom the depths of our own hearts. Have we ourselves never experienced this unhappy privation of grace? Let us recall the time of our retreats, that of our novitiate and other days of fervour. Do we not find that in consequence of our having neglected to correspond with the

[1] Lament. iv. 1.

lights and inspirations then received, the Almighty has withheld many others? 'God is not mocked.'[1] He ends by forsaking those who have first abandoned Him.

My soul, the fate which has befallen so many others may likewise happen to thee. 'The Lord is a strong revenger,'[2] 'He hath' already 'bent His bow,'[3] 'He shall whet his sword as the lightning.'[4] It may be that the moment is not far distant when the chain of graces destined for thee shall be broken, the robe of sanctity, the crown of glory, taken from thee to be given to another more deserving. 'Oh, great and awful God! fear and trembling are come upon me.'[5] Who would not shudder with fear at seeing the gift of grace pass from Heli to Samuel, from Saul to David, from Judas to Mathias? 'If these things are done in the green wood, what shall be done in the dry.'[6] If a pontiff, a king, a disciple are rejected, what shall not happen to me? Oh, accursed moment in which I resisted the divine inspirations! 'Who will give to my eyes a fountain of tears,'[7] to wash away my criminal ingratitude? Divine Redeemer of my soul! vouchsafe to me once more that heavenly light to which I have so long closed my heart. I acknowledge myself unworthy of Thy least assistance; but since, even when 'Thou art angry Thou wilt remember mercy,'[8] grant me, I implore Thee, a victorious grace which will enable me to terminate the ingratitude of my past life in order to commence a new and holy one.

Article III.

Of the discernment of spirits.

Abuse of grace includes the greatest insult to God, and it is usually followed by the most awful chastisements.

[1] Gal. vi. 7. [2] Jerem. li. 56. [3] Ps. vii. 13. [4] Deut. xxxii. 41.
[5] Ps. liv. 6. [6] Luke xxiii. 31. [7] Jerem. ix. 1. [8] Habac. iii. 2.

These truths, maturely weighed in the preceding articles, must, doubtless, have inspired us with a firm determination to listen in future with docility to the voice of God. But that this holy disposition may produce fruit, it behoves us to know the marks of divine inspirations as well as the manner in which they should be received and the cogent reasons there are for our obeying them.

1. *Rules for recognising the divine inspiration.*

1. If we desire to prepare our souls properly for the grace of the discernment of spirits, we must: 1. Frequently recollect ourselves and silence the actual desires of our heart, the better to hear the interior whisperings of the Holy Ghost; for if the 'wisdom,' taught by this divine Spirit 'will not enter into the malicious soul,'[1] neither will it enter into a dissipated one. The daughter of Jairus did not hear the voice of Jesus recalling her to life till 'the riotous crowd' that filled the house had retired.[2]

2. We must subdue our sensuality and tepidity, because the one obscures our understanding, the other captivates our will; the one conceals the path traced out by grace, the other deprives us of the courage to tread therein, whilst both oppose insuperable barriers to the reception of the word of God.

3. We should often repeat with St. Paul, either during meditation or after holy communion, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?'[3] Possessing such dispositions we may be fully satisfied that God will not fail to speak frequently to our hearts in order to manifest His will to us.

But Satan, in order to deceive us, 'frequently trans-

[1] Wisd. i. 4. [2] Matt. ix. 23. [3] Acts ix. 6.

forms himself into an angel of light,'[1] and suggests thoughts which are apparently good. Of this we are forewarned by the beloved disciple, who says: 'Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits if they be of God.'[2]

The following rules will serve as a guide to us in making a discernment which so nearly concerns our salvation. When we find our will excited by any interior movement, let us examine whether peace, consolation, joy, and the desire of perfection are the fruits of the existing inspiration, or whether its results are distraction, disquietude, disgust, sadness, dangerous impressions, and a disrelish for virtue. The last are certain indications of the temptations of the evil spirit. For 'the Lord dwells not in agitation'[3] and anxiety, 'but He is the God of peace'[4] 'and of all consolation,'[5] the God who forms 'the light and dispels the darkness.'[6]

2. Let us examine whether we entertain a firm confidence of obtaining sufficient strength from God to carry out the interior inspirations, or whether we are not uneasy lest, 'having laid the foundation of the edifice and not being able to finish it, all that see it begin to mock us, saying, this man began to build and was not able to finish.'[7] This firm faith and confidence of receiving succour from on high is a sure sign that it is God who speaks to us. When an inspiration presents itself we must reflect whether it is persistent, also whether it constantly and invariably incites us to good; for instability of the desires and vacillation of the will, 'like a wave of the sea which is moved and carried about by the wind,'[8] attest the insidious workings of the spirit of darkness.

[1] 2 Cor. xi. 14. [2] 1 John iv. 1. [3] 3 Kings xix. 11. [4] 2 Cor. xiii. 11.
[5] 2 Cor. i. 3. [6] Isai xlv. 7. [7] Luke xiv. 29. [8] James i. 6.

We must, then, as St. Ignatius advises, studiously observe the commencement, the progress, and the end of those interior movements. Have we experienced them in a time of fervour, consolation, peace, and tranquillity; or did they come to agitate us when bitterness, sadness, tepidity or some evil disposition prevented the spirit from exercising a due control over the senses? Have they occurred at an unseasonable time, when, for instance, we were engaged in some duty of obedience with which they had no connexion, and were, perhaps, even incompatible? Such movements do not proceed from the Holy Ghost, since there can be no opposition in divine inspirations.

We may attribute them with certainty to God if during their continuance they preserve our mind calm and tranquil, and illuminate our understanding with supernatural light. Should they, on the other hand, be accompanied with disgust, anxiety, and obscurity of mind, the demon is indubitably their author.

In conclusion, do they serve as a salutary spur to the soul, inducing it to run with alacrity in the paths of sanctity, to fulfil its daily duties more perfectly, to mortify the senses and preserve interior recollection? Or, do they inspire it with disgust for heavenly things, dissipation, disrelish for virtue, sadness, tepidity, melancholy, and lassitude for good works?

The first effects are the action of the Holy Ghost, the second that of the malign spirit. In a word, 'the surest marks and, at the same time, the most precious fruits of the divine inspiration, are fervour, humility, and peace.'[1]

We must never forget that the inspirations which come from God are always in conformity with the

[1] St. Bernd. Serm.

maxims of scripture and theology, with the principles of morality approved of by the Church, and with the customs of religious communities; that they are in accordance with the obligations of our state, suitable to our inclinations, character, strength, and natural talents, and in some measure subordinate to our employments, condition, and age. But this sweetness, condescension, and bounty, with which the Spirit of God speaks to our soul, renders us more blamable, nay, altogether inexcusable, if, 'stiff-necked,' like the Jews, 'uncircumcised in heart and ears,' we obstinately continue 'to resist Him.'[1] A diligent attention to these rules will enable us to 'separate the precious from the vile: we shall be as the mouth of God,'[2] 'and the spirit of lying shall not deceive us, and shall not prevail against us.'[3]

2. *Docility in obeying the divine inspirations.*

When, by the application of the foregoing rules, we have acquired a certainty that the inspiration is from God, we are bound to obey it promptly, generously, and perseveringly.

1. There must be no delay in our obedience, for 'God loveth a cheerful giver.'[4] Procrastination is most displeasing to Him. The Spouse of the Canticles expiated for long the having deferred to open the door to her Beloved. The Majesty of the God of armies, the King of kings, is too august, too exalted, to permit that man, a vile worm, should, with impunity, compel Him to wait when He deigns to visit him with His grace. So culpable a delay arrests the course of the divine favours, augments the difficulties of virtue, exposes us to the risk

[1] Acts vii. 51.
[2] Jerem. xv. 19.
[3] 3 Kings xxii. 22.
[4] 2 Cor. ix. 7.

of being incapacitated from performing the good we omitted at the proper time, either because the opportunity for doing so does not recur, or the divine assistance has been withdrawn.

Let us arise and trample on all that impedes the accomplishment of the divine will. Since we desire to obey, why not do so at present? Is not the God who shall reign eternally the same who reigns to-day? Is He not always equally magnificent in His recompenses and awful in His chastisements? If He demanded nothing difficult, our obedience would be devoid of merit, and consequently disentitled to reward. The more the victory will have cost us, the more glorious shall be our recompense. Let us then be generous with God. The monster that excites our alarm is the fish of Tobias. 'Instead of fearing let us seize it,'[1] and it shall be conquered, and soon, together with our fears, the painful efforts which shook our best resolutions shall be at an end.

3. Our fidelity to the divine inspirations must be constant and perseverant. What would it avail us to commence well and not to finish?—to build with one hand and throw down with the other? to roll a stone to the mountain's brow, if afterwards its own gravity causes it to rebound? The punishment due to our inconstancy shall be proportioned to our want of correspondence with the heavenly lights and other graces vouchsafed.

We must endeavour to understand clearly what God demands of us by His inspirations. What inordinate affection, what vice He wishes us to eradicate; what sacrifice, bodily mortification, act of virtue or good work He asks of us; what the things He would have us do,

[1] Tob. vi. 4.

what the action He prohibits. Descending into the depths of our heart, we must listen attentively to the divine voice, and hold ourselves in readiness to obey. Let us hearken to the advice of the Apostle: 'Neglect not the grace that is in thee, which was given thee,'[1] otherwise with the slothful servant of the Gospel who 'digged into the earth and hid his lord's money,'[2] we 'shall be cast into exterior darkness.'[3]

3. *Motives which should incite us to obey the divine inspirations.*

Everyone who is rash enough to trifle with the inspirations of grace exposes himself to the imminent danger of being lost. Can we doubt it? The supernatural lights and inspirations of the Holy Ghost are the aids vouchsafed us by God to withdraw us from 'the wide and broad way that leadeth to destruction,' and strengthen us to walk 'in the narrow way that leadeth to life.'[4] Should we neglect them we must inevitably fall into tepidity and be cast off by the Almighty. It is evident that if we neglect the means, we do not desire the end. Our profession as religious obliges us, under pain of mortal sin, to tend to the perfection of our state and advancement in virtue. But the holy inspirations and lights of grace are the indispensable means afforded us by God for the attainment of this twofold end. Every time, therefore, that we contemn or slight these heavenly gifts, we neglect one of our most essential obligations—that of striving to become perfect.

But to continue. Once a man has attained the years of discretion, he is bound to make acts of faith, hope and charity, from time to time, and no sinner can ever obtain

[1] 1 Tim. iv. 14.
[2] Matt. xxv. 18.
[3] Matt. xxii. 13.
[4] Matt. vii. 14.

forgiveness without an act of supernatural contrition. Now, such acts are the special work of divine grace, without which we are absolutely incapable of eliciting them; consequently, by refusing this succour we incapacitate ourselves for obtaining the remission of our sins and gaining heaven. St. Gregory says, we even deserve that God should refuse to listen to us since we, in the first instance, have refused to listen to Him. 'If,' says he, 'any one obey not the interior inspirations and divine admonitions, let him know that God in His turn will cease to listen to and hear his prayer.'[1]

Again, though a soul should have attained the highest sanctity, it would, nevertheless, perish eternally if deprived of the gift of final perseverance. Now, all the fathers and doctors of the Church teach that the Almighty has ordained that this precious gift should bear a strict relation, an intimate connexion with the interior lights and movements of grace, and it often happens that He, whose judgments are inscrutable, withholds it from those who turn a deaf ear to the divine inspirations. Thus it is that He punishes our rejection of the graces which His clemency has offered to us.

We behold with mingled sentiments of astonishment and fear the Gentiles substituted for the Jews, the Churches of the West for those of the East, the peoples of America, Japan, and other idolatrous countries for the heretical countries of Europe. May not the same hapless abandonment, experienced by whole nations, be likewise extended to us?

We have already remarked, and it is a thing we should never forget, that the subtraction of grace is as ordinary a punishment as it is equitable and dreadful. 'It is just,' says St. Augustine, 'that a property should

[1] St. Greg. Mor.

be taken from him that does not administer it properly, and that even the knowledge of good should be withdrawn from him who knows, but will not practise it.' Children of God! 'If to-day you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'[1] When the Sovereign Master speaks to you interiorly, lend Him, as St. Bernard advises, the ear of your understanding and your will. Listen to the 'light breeze'[2] of the voice of God, that you may know what 'is good and perfect in His sight,'[3] and obey His divine admonitions.

CHAPTER IV.

OF THE PREDOMINANT PASSION.

THE predominant passion is, according to the masters of the spiritual life, one of the chief obstacles to the acquisition of solid virtue. Like the Dragon of the Apocalypse, 'who persecuted the woman in great wrath,'[4] this tyrannical vice cruelly harasses the soul it desires to conquer, tormenting it without intermission till it has subjected it to its despotic control by a thousand disastrous defeats. Then, become formidable as a strong army, it insolently 'keepeth possession' of the house in which it has taken up its abode, and it rarely happens that 'a stronger than it'[5] comes to dispute its title.

Of all our enemies it is the most implacable and dangerous. To animate ourselves to an unrelenting and successful war against it we must make ourselves fully cognisant of the injury it may do us, endeavour to discover its artifices, and above all, remove and overthrow all such obstacles towards its defeat as may proceed from ourselves.

[1] Ps. xciv. 8. [2] 3 Kings xix. 12. [3] Rom. xii. 2.
[4] Apoc. xii. 3, 13. [5] Luke xi. 21.

Article I.

How detrimental the Predominant Passion is to our soul.

1. *It is a universal enemy.*

The predominant passion violently assails all men in every action of their lives. In all conditions, in every state of life we are exposed to its deadly and insidious attacks.

It is a domestic enemy which possesses a kind of omnipotence, a universal power to injure us. We meet it everywhere: it makes war on the most confirmed virtue: attaches itself to the holiest works to render them defective in their commencement, continuance, or, at least, in their end; it intrudes itself into everything we do, and never allows an opportunity of attacking us to pass. We may say with truth that it is the origin of the greater number of our sins, as well as of all the evils that afflict mankind. The predominant passion tends to deteriorate all that is good; and as there is no evil from which it recoils, so there is no crime of which it is not in some manner the source, the sustenance, and the support.

The demon himself, mark well this truth, the demon who day and night, 'as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour,'[1] cannot, despite his rage, do us any harm should we constantly resist the unhappy but too seductive importunities of the predominant passion.

How great and universal, then, is the empire of this vice over men!

Let us resume this article, and with the sacred history

[1] 1 Pet. v. 8.

in our hand confirm every proposition of it by striking illustrations.

In no condition or state of life are we beyond the reach of the assaults of the predominant passion. The very disciples of the Saviour had to be on their guard against it. This passion it was which inspired the ambitious dispute as to 'which amongst them should be the greatest;'[1] which caused St. Peter to fall from presumption into perjury, and led Thomas from a haughty reliance on his own lights into incredulity; but still more appallingly are its dismal effects exemplified in the unhappy Judas, whose avarice transformed him from an apostle into an execrable renegade, a deicide, a demon!

Kings on their thrones, priests and pontiffs in the sanctuary, religious in the cloister, have to be on the defensive against its snares. It attacks all men indiscriminately, and there is no one living exempt from the empire of some predominant passion, or who does not at least experience its unremitting efforts to subjugate him.

2. This passion, by the guilty connivance of its slaves, equally profanes the holiest places and most venerated objects. This it was which led Heliodorus into the temple of Jerusalem to rifle it of its treasures; caused the sacrilegious Jeroboam to ascend the altar erected at Bethel; instigated Ozias to usurp the priestly functions and lay an impious hand upon 'the censer to burn incense'[2] before the Lord. It was this passion which, descending to the baseness of envy, incited the Jews to their unjust hatred of our Lord, whom they vilified as guilty of the most odious crimes, accusing Him of being

[1] Luke xxii. 24. [2] 2 Paralip. xxvi. 19.

a man addicted to wine, a seducer of the people, an impious person who desired to destroy the temple. It had previously ascended into heaven above 'the stars of God' and had deposited in the heart of Lucifer the germ of rebellion and the criminal desire 'of being like to the Most High, of placing his throne on the Mount of the Covenant in the sides of the north.'[1] No; there is no place or object so sacred that this passion does not defile, no sanctity so eminent that it does not assail, nor any virtue so steadfast that it does not seek to overthrow. This passion it was that incited Cain to the murder of Abel, David to adultery, Solomon to the worship of idols, Jezabel to the unjust slaughter of Naboth, and Herod to the massacre of the Innocents. These great crimes originated in the hatred, the ambition, the unchaste desires or the avarice which reigned in the hearts of the perpetrators of them. The most enormous crimes, the most frightful calamities which have desolated the earth have had their source in the predominant passion.

This vice carried fire and sword into the fairest provinces; it formerly delivered up Italy to the Vandals. Spain to the Moors, and Asia to the Mahometans. By a deplorable schism it has wrested England, Greece, and many other flourishing Churches from the centre of unity. The envy which animated the children of Jacob was 'the wild beast which devoured Joseph,'[2] and wrung his father's heart with anguish. The fear which enslaved the timid Aaron was the criminal artisan of the Golden Calf, the infamous object of the idolatry of the Israelites. The jealousy which predominated over the hearts of the Pharisees, the hatred which swayed the

[1] Isai. xiv. 13. [2] Gen. xxxvii. 33.

priests, the contemptible weakness which governed Pilate, were the real executioners of Jesus Christ, the cruel ministers of the bloody drama of Calvary. How many heresies have had their source in the obstinate pride of their authors! How many states have been delivered up to the most frightful calamities by the unrestrained ambition of the great! How many scandals have desolated the Church through the negligence of its pastors! Finally, how many religious orders have perished by the tepidity which, having penetrated into their bosom, sapped the foundations of discipline! How true it is that the predominant passion is a universal power, since there is no condition, state of life, or place, so holy as to be impervious to its attacks. And yet we lovingly cherish this monster in our hearts, we allow it to impose its laws upon us. The evil it does us, the wounds we have received from it, our manifold experiences, fail to arouse our hatred against it. But how long shall we submit to so humiliating and impious a bondage? How long remain the willing slaves of so execrable a tyrant? Shall we still persist in subjecting reason to concupiscence, the mistress to the slave, 'the son of the free woman to the son of the bond woman?'[1] It is ample time to form a generous resolution. Let us remember 'we are not the children of Agar,' but of her mistress. Let us 'shake off, let us loose from our neck the yoke'[2] that oppresses us, and let us at length possess 'the freedom wherewith Christ has made us free.'[3]

My God, Thou who didst deliver Daniel from the lions' den, rescue me from the evil propensity which tyrannises over me and which is more to be feared by me than even 'the teeth of wild beasts.' Grant me the

[1] Gal. iv. 31. [2] Gen. xxvii. 40. [3] Gal. iv. 31.

grace utterly to detest it during my whole life, as the iniquitous source of the misfortunes which can befall me.

2. *It is an obstinate enemy.*

The predominant passion attacks us with the most consummate cunning, and the most obstinate pertinacity. 1. Proteus-like, it assumes all kinds of forms, but particularly that of virtue. It disguises itself now under the mask of charity, now under that of prudence. Its profusion, ambition, irregularities, avarice, anger, all its vices, in fine, it characterises as liberality, temperance, magnanimity, and other equally laudable qualities. 'Transforming itself into an Angel of light,'[1] it seeks to justify in itself what it condemns in others. At the very moment that it forcibly constrains our will to drag it into the paths of vice, and labours unremittingly for the ruin of our soul, it simulates the sincerest friendship, the kindest intentions in our regard. It dazzles and deceives our reason by the false colouring with which it invests things, and is repaid by the sophisms with which the latter seeks to conceal its baseness and encourage its criminal evagations. Let us but refer to some of the numerous instances afforded by Scripture of the captious disguises under which the predominant passion cloaks itself.

Nabuchodonosor wished 'to subject all the land to his laws,' but his pretensions being resisted, 'this prince being angry, swore by his throne and kingdom that he would defend himself and would avenge himself on those countries,'[2] to punish their obstinacy. Behold to what an excess of arrogance passion is capable of leading a heart over which it reigns. This ambitious and brutal

[1] 2 Cor. xi. 14. [2] Judith i. 11.

conqueror declares an unjust war. Though no nation has attacked him, he speaks only of defending himself. He terms an unjust aggression the preservation of his legitimate rights, and places the subjugation and destruction of unoffending nations amongst the catalogue of royal virtues!

Dathan and Abiron, and two hundred and fifty of the children of Israel, all princes of the Synagogue, instigated by jealousy and anger, rise up against Moses, alleging their anxiety to overthrow a usurped and tyrannical government as the plea for the revolt, thus attributing to zeal their impious sedition.

'Ananias kept back part of the price of a piece of land he had sold, his wife being privy thereunto: and bringing a certain part of it, laid it at the feet of the Apostles.'[1] Both saw in this action only a reasonable care of their interests, a prudential foresight against future contingencies, whilst in reality it was a base falsehood and a sordid attachment to earthly goods. Judas qualified as compassion for the poor the insatiable avarice and cupidity which led him to blame Magdalen for pouring the perfume on the feet of our Redeemer.

Thus it is that the predominant passion, always fruitful in subterfuges, borrows the mantle of virtue, under which it so artfully conceals the most censurable faults, that even with the utmost vigilance it is exceedingly difficult to guard against its treachery.

2. Neither does its pertinacity cede to its subtlety in injuring us. Of this the prophet Jonas is an instance. Inordinate attachment to his reputation, the loss or diminution of which would, he feared, ensue should his predictions fail to be verified, induced him to rise up

[1] Acts v. 2.

and flee to 'Tharsis from the face of the Lord,' who had commanded him to go to 'Ninive the great city' to denounce threats of divine vengeance against the inhabitants. But the justice of God pursues him; 'a great tempest was raised in the sea, the lot fell on Jonas; he was cast into the sea and immediately swallowed by a fish, which, three days afterwards, cast him back upon the shore.' Insensible to so severe a lesson, he resists a second time, and, instead of repairing at once to Ninive to execute the orders of the Almighty, he waits for 'a reiteration of the divine command. Then, and not till then, does he arise and go to Ninive.'[2] But what an unpitiable enemy is the predominant passion! Unappeased by this first fall of the prophet, it persists in making violent assaults upon his virtue. Moved by his preachings, the Ninivites turned from 'their evil ways, and God had mercy on them' and did not destroy their city. Then Jonas 'was exceedingly troubled and was angry to such a degree as to desire death;' 'Lord,' said he, 'I beseech Thee take my life from me: for it is better for me to die than to live.'[3] Why all this anguish? Oh! my soul, it is that thou mayest understand all the obstinacy of the predominant passion.

According to the prophet's own avowal, excessive attachment to his reputation, and the fear of passing for a false prophet, because Ninive had not been destroyed as he had predicted, were the sole cause of his affliction. How difficult of cure, therefore, are the effects of the poison which this vice instils into the soul! Jonas sees that in punishment of his disobedience the waves rise up to engulf him, he is cast into the sea and swallowed up alive by a monster, and yet he will not

[1] Jonas i. 2. [2] Jonas iii. 1, and fol. [3] Jonas iv. 1, etc.

yield. On the contrary, when God asks him, 'Dost thou think thou hast reason to be angry?' he has the audacity to reply, 'I am angry with reason even unto death.'[1] Thus does he anticipate the maxim of St. Augustine, that 'no one will acknowledge that his anger is unjust.'

It is then certain that the predominant passion is an inveterate disease, which is often proof against even the most effectual remedies. It is an enemy which no concessions can mollify, which never wearies with time, and increases its exactions in proportion to the advances that are made to it. It imbibes new strength from its defeats. A thousand times vanquished, a thousand times it returns to the charge. The struggle with it ends only with our life: it redoubles its fury in our last moments, and lends all its forces to the devil to compel us to relapse into our sins of habit. How can it be difficult to detest this universal, artful, and implacable enemy of man?

3. *It is a dearly-loved enemy.*

How should we not lament our folly! We love this treacherous foe, we foster it in our bosom, we take up its defence on every occasion.

Voluntarily blind, we will neither acknowledge its malice, nor try to discover its wiles. We applaud the success of its artifices and triumphs over us. We cherish the wounds it has inflicted on us, shut our eyes to avoid seeing the precipice whither it is hurrying us, and close our ears to the voice of conscience, and of the Holy Spirit that admonishes us of our danger. This it is that renders the combat so difficult, and the danger of

[1] Jonas iv. 9.

defeat so imminent. For we do not zealously defend ourselves against an adversary whom we love. We aim our blows very cautiously when there is nothing we dread so much as the being conquerors. We resemble a sick man, who, satisfied with his disease, will only accept of agreeable remedies without concerning himself as to whether they are salutary, and who prefers the attention bestowed on him in a tedious illness to the recovery of his health by nauseous draughts. Meantime the evil strikes deeper roots, it grows stronger, it daily extends its empire over the soul, whilst the will, on the contrary, continually grows weaker, and grace incessantly diminishes.

Since our enemy keeps up a correspondence with our heart, how imperative is it not on us to declare open war against it, and to arm ourselves for the conquest with a continual mortification? Unless we recur to these measures, we shall make no progress in virtue, and shall remain plunged in our vices. Ah! let us promptly re-animate our courage, let us prepare for the battle, and re-echo the victorious war-cry, 'who is like to God?' Let us fearlessly commence the attack. What! do we still hesitate? Reason prohibits our 'obeying our concupiscence,' and the Almighty commands us 'to subdue and conquer it.'[1] Let us at length shake off the yoke of an unjust tyranny and restore to our soul that liberty which is its heritage. The vice which reigns in our heart is a 'serpent of a hundred windings,'[2] whose bite, like a virulent gangrene, spreads and becomes incurable if we defer to apply remedies for even the briefest period. To work, therefore, at once. Let us, from this very day, apply the axe to the

[1] Gen. iv. 7. [2] Job xxvi. 13.

root of the tree; and avenge ourselves on this iniquitous usurper. The victory is already won, should we but commence generously, but if 'we give our souls their desires they will make us a joy to our enemies.'[1]

'Most Mighty, the God of the spirits of all flesh,'[2] my resolution is taken, aided by Thy grace, 'I Thy servant will go and I will fight against this Philistine,'[3] nor will I abstain from doing so till I have conquered and forced him to surrender. Do Thou, 'Lord, the strength of my salvation, protect me in the day of battle,'[4] that my efforts may be crowned with victory.

Article II.

1. *Of the knowledge of the predominant passion.*

1. Of the motions of the soul and how they are to be distinguished.

Before seeking the means to recognise our predominant passion for the purpose of annihilating it, I deem it necessary to explain what is meant by the movement or passion of the soul, and into how many kinds it is distinguished. Passion, says St. Thomas, 'is a movement'[5] experienced in the inferior part of the soul and 'excited by the representation of the good or evil that we perceive in an object.'[6] According as this object appears advantageous or injurious we love and desire, or hate and reject it. The passions, according to the same holy doctor, 'are divided into two classes: the one has for its object sensible good or evil considered as such; they are six in number: love and hatred, desire and

[1] Eccli. xxiii. 21. [2] Numb. xvi. 22. [3] 1 Kings xvii. 32. [4] Ps. cxxxix. 8.
[5] (Note of Fr. Berton)—In all this number we have suppressed the expressions: appetitive power, concupiscible appetite, and irascible appetite as too abstruse for the generality of readers.[6] St. Thom. 1. 2, q. 22, a. 3.

flight, joy and sadness. The others have also sensible good or evil for object; but considered as difficult of acquisition or avoidance, they are reckoned as five, namely: hope and despair, courage and fear, and lastly, anger, which alone has no contrary passion. All the other passions relate to those as to their principle.'[1] Men chiefly esteem as sensible good, riches, honours, and sensual gratification, and regard as evil, poverty, contempt, and suffering.

Our soul, under the impression of the passions of the first class, loves and desires this sensible good and rejoices at its possession; it hates and rejects evil, and is distressed when it befalls it. Under the impression of passions of the second class it hopes to obtain this good, pursues it ardently, and also sometimes despairs of the success of its efforts. On the contrary it fears evil and is irritated when unable to avoid it.

2. *Different means of discovering the predominant passion.*

First means.—When we feel an extraordinary increase of sadness or joy, let us examine its cause.

1. We will perceive to what species of evil we must attribute this augmentation of sadness, according to the sentiments of fear, aversion, dismay, and even anger which our soul experiences; because it is always the apprehension of some evil that incites and produces these kinds of affections. 2. In like manner we shall discover to what description of good we are to refer the increase of joy by the interior sentiments of desire, love, hope, ardour, or, in fine, despair; since these other sorts of affections originate in the thought of some good

[1] St. Thom. 1. 2, q. 22, a. 3.

which we are solicitous to obtain. It is true, then, as St Thomas remarks, that all the movements of the soul 'terminate in sadness or in joy.'[1] We rejoice when we escape the evil which excites our fear, hatred, or aversion; or when we obtain the good which forms the object of our hope, love, and desires. On the contrary, we fall into dejection when we are unable either to avert that evil or procure that good. An unerring guide, therefore, in the discovery of the predominant passion is to trace our affections to the source of our joy or sadness by a diligent examination. If, for example, we take pleasure in praise, honours, and elevated employments, and are grieved when we are despised, blamed, or insulted, we may be convinced that pride has usurped the empire of our heart and reigns there as master.

When Jonas is grieved because the Lord, appeased by the repentance of the Ninivites, does not accomplish his prediction by destroying their city, the pride which inspires him with an inordinate attachment to his honour and reputation is the real source of his sadness. When, on the contrary, he rejoices at the shade afforded him by the ivy and is angry when this shrub withers, these two so different affections proceed from self-love which causes him to rejoice at the sensual good afforded him and to despond at the inconvenience incidental to its withdrawal.

Second means.—A second means of discerning our predominant passion is seriously to examine the dispositions of our heart. It will be easy to perceive that our impressions of love or hatred, desire or aversion, hope or fear, are concentrated on some particular object, which constantly and exclusively occupies our thoughts

[1] St. Thom. 1. 2, q. 25, a. 1.

and is the source of nearly all the sins which form the subject of our confessions. It is some honour, convenience, or pleasure that we covet; some pain, vexation, or slight that we apprehend. We may recognise our predominant passion by these signs; for this insatiable anxiety to preserve or augment our reputation, this inordinate attachment to bodily comforts, are the exhaustless sources of our daily faults.

Pride engenders boasting, haughtiness, envy, calumny, ambition, hatred, and quarrels. Self-love, that is to say, an irregular attachment to our reputation and corporal gratification, is the origin of sloth, of the depraved inclinations, of gluttony, murmuring, secret injustices, violation of the vows, and of numberless other vices which dishonour our soul.

Third means.—The third means of discovering our predominant passion bears a near affinity to the first: it consists in examining what most strongly influences the affections of our heart, what angers, intimidates, pleases, disturbs, or disquiets us. For example, rarely to think of anything except the gratification of the senses and the comforts of life; to be grieved or disturbed by the anticipation of illness or the responsibility of an onerous employment; to be displeased at the conduct and defects of others, is an unmistakable sign of our being the slaves of self-love which shrinks from sufferings and discomfort, and impetuously desires gratifications of every description. In like manner, the man who is ruled by ambition, dreams of nothing but applause and honours; he is pre-occupied and anxious concerning the success which he expects from a composition, a carefully prepared discourse, or some business that has been intrusted to him; he fears being placed in the lowest ranks or employed in lowly offices.

But let us continue our examen, and, by applying it to each of our actions, we shall find that the desire of the applause and esteem of men, of which our heart is the slave, gives rise almost insensibly to human respect, this enemy of all virtue which ceaselessly strives to beguile our weakness into the worship of its disgraceful idol. 'What will men say of it?' We shall also find that when the concupiscence of sensual pleasures predominates in us, it is the real cause of our cowardice and sloth, in conquering sleep and rising at the appointed time. Human respect and sloth, in their turn, engender tepidity, and produce those daily and numberless faults which we bemoan, and sometimes even make us fall into very serious sins.

Fourth means.—The predominant passion is a crafty serpent which lurks in the grass the better to deceive us, but, notwithstanding its artifices, its presence may be easily detected by the following tokens.

1. Like the air which insinuates itself everywhere through which it can find an opening, the predominant passion penetrates with an inconceivable subtilty into all our actions, but particularly the more important ones, in order to usurp at least some portion of them, should it be foiled in its efforts to obtain the whole. It intrudes itself everywhere, profits by every event, everywhere finds nutriment for its life. We may judge of this by the conduct of a man whose heart is under the dominion of pride: he acts only through self-complacency, lauds himself in his discourses, his very errors furnish food for his vanity, he even glories in the contempt of which he is the object, and prides himself on the humiliations which befall him. It was thus that the apostles were weak enough to be puffed up 'because

the devils were subject to them,'[1] and to yield to vain-glory at the very moment that they were 'banishing' the demon of pride from the bodies of the possessed.

2. The predominant passion invariably triumphs over the opposition which it meets with from the other passions of the soul. Placing itself at their head, it compels them to obey and recognise its sovereignty. In vain will pride, avarice, and self-love, cry out to the slave of gluttony that he is compromising his honour, fortune, and life; he turns a deaf ear to their remonstrances and perseveres in his intemperance. Thus gluttony silences all the other passions, which cede to it the victory.

From the moment that hatred took possession of the heart of Aman, and that he resolved to destroy Mardochai, he ceased to sacrifice to ambition, to riches, and to honours, he became insensible to the attention and flattery of his friends and the affection of his wife. 'Whereas I have all these things,' he exclaimed, in the bitterness of his heart, 'I think I have nothing so long as I see Mardochai the Jew.'[2] The longing after liberty which tyrannised over the Prodigal Son, rendered him so ungrateful as to trample under foot the love which he owed to his father and his country, and despise all the dangers of exile. Ambition held unrivalled sway over the brutal and suspicious Herod. Avarice, pride, licentiousness, the voice of flesh and blood itself possessed no power over this sanguinary and ferocious tyrant. Rather than lose his kingdom, he despoiled himself of his treasures, despatched enormous sums to Rome, basely fawned upon the emperors, and steeped his parricidal hands in the blood of his nearest kindred, including his wife and children.

[1] Luke x. 17. [2] Esther v. 13.

3. Another characteristic of our predominant passion is the particular pains we take to defend, exonerate and even authorise an evil inclination in ourselves.

We consent to be accused of every other vice, provided only this be spared. The proud man will submit to be accused of avarice, envy, inebriety; but reproach him with his pride, and you have laid your finger on the wound, you have supplied fuel to the flame. What a marvel is this—a person would prefer being anything to what he really is!

Nevertheless, most frequently our 'salvation comes from our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us.'[1] For when they taunt us with our faults, when they take pleasure in humiliating us by reminding us particularly of our principal weakness, how beneficial is their censure to us! The vice with which they most bitterly and, as it were, triumphantly reproach us, that without doubt is our predominant passion.

Lastly, it is from the director of our conscience that we shall learn it with most certainty; it is he to whom we shall have laid our whole soul open, that can best discover to us its most dangerous malady. But, as 'the grain of mustard' which is the least of 'all seeds,' becomes afterwards, 'when grown up, greater than all herbs, and becometh a tree,'[2] so the commencement of the predominant passion is not alone exceedingly small but almost imperceptible. And yet, despite the apparent insignificance of the nascent vice, it is no easy matter to extirpate the young roots. Let us then make haste to turn the knowledge of the chief marks which distinguish it to account, let us take them for the basis of a serious reflection on ourselves; and this vice so

[1] Luke i. 71. [2] Matt. xiii. 31, 32.

formidable, especially for its wiles, shall not escape our investigations nor resist our magnanimous attacks.

Yes, let us take courage, let us wage an implacable war against it in our particular examen: the longer and more arduous the combat the greater shall be our glory, the brighter our crown. If the patient man struggling with adversity attracts the eye of God, how much more forcibly does not the Christian soldier combating unrelentingly with the violence of his passions arrest His attention; and if, as St. Jerome testifies, 'it is a great virtue to sustain a daily warfare against ourselves and to keep a strict watch over the movements of the domestic enemy,' what glory, what eulogiums does not he merit, says St. Laurence Justinian, 'who, faithful to the reason bestowed on him by God, follows its pure lights unswervingly, in order to direct and govern all the movements of his heart with perfect order; who says to one passion: Go, and it goeth; to another: Come, and it cometh; who says to the body as to his slave: Do this, and it doeth it.' This conduct assimilates us to the angels, it exalts man to all that his loftiest aspirations can ambition. Let us, then, arm ourselves without delay and fearlessly attack the foe. We must not say like St. Augustine: 'soon, soon,' . . . leave me 'yet a little' while; for this 'soon' might never have an end, and this 'yet a little,' might be prolonged to eternity.'[1]

Oh, Thou, 'who commandest the sea and the winds,'[2] deign also to restore peace to my heart, which is agitated 'like a raging sea which cannot rest.'[3] It is like a 'kingdom divided,' which cannot long subsist; 'for avarice seeks to enthrone itself therein: boasting, pride, lust, calumny, envy, and anger follow each other in

[1] Confess. [2] Matt. viii. 26. [3] Isai. lvii. 20.

rapid succession, and dispute the supremacy of my unhappy soul, of which each covets the possession';[1] and I, the wretched sport of their disputes, become the slave of all, by serving each in turn. But I have made my choice. With St. Bernard, I resolve, henceforth 'to resist with all my power, to defend myself with all my strength. I resolve, oh, my Saviour! to remain wholly dependent on Thee, since I know that I am thine. Come then, Lord, and scatter my enemies by Thy power. Thou alone shalt reign in me, for Thou alone art my King and my God.' Grant me to realise how prejudicial my predominant passion is to me; and deign to assist me to turn to account the means Thou hast bestowed on me to discern and extirpate it.

Article III.

Of the obstacles which prevent us from combating our predominant passion.

There are three great impediments to be removed before we can succeed in extirpating our predominant passion, viz., obstinacy in ignoring our disease, diffidence of its cure, and negligence in the seasonable and persevering application of efficacious remedies.

1. *Obstinacy in ignoring our disease.*

There are men 'who resist the light, that they may not be obliged to do well;[2] who shrink from knowing their malady, lest they should be obliged to take remedies; who do not regard evil as such; who alone ignore their faults, which are visible to everyone else. Their foolish heart is darkened;'[3] it gives free admission to the most irrational desires, and even defends them as

[1] St. Bernd. Serm. [2] Ps. xxxv. 4. [3] Rom. i. 21.

just and right. These persons are in reality the slaves of anger, pride, and avarice; though were we to credit themselves, there is no one more meek, humble, or disinterested than they. To judge from their statement, there is no defect to which they are less prone than that which evidently predominates in them. They not only pardon, they commend their anger, ambition, avarice, envy, immorality; they even term these odious vices equity, economy, zeal, excusable gaiety.

Thus this wilful ignorance of our disease is the first fortress in which our predominant passion entrenches itself. Not being aware of the evil, we take no pains to arrest it. It daily makes new progress, till at length it has become so strong as to be able to defy all remedies.

Let us penetrate the secrets of our conscience. Do we not believe ourselves innocent, when we are really guilty? fancy ourselves exempt from the passion which rules over us? carry the illusion so far as to glory in being perfectly free from it? and should it be impossible to close our eyes to the light and conceal our capital defect from ourselves, do we not try to give it the gloss of piety and justice?

Let us cast a searching glance into the depths of our heart. Do we not attribute our murmurs, complaints, and recriminations to a zeal for discipline? justify our desire of the first posts, our insatiable anxiety to display our talents and establish our reputation, by the specious pretext of zeal for the divine glory and the salvation of souls? Do we not style our dislike to labour, our self-seeking, and avoidance of mortification, prudence? In a word do we not give our predominating vice the name of the contrary virtue?

Should the illusion warp our judgment thus far

'iniquity hath lied to itself,'[1] and we deceive ourselves. But the time has come for arising from sleep and dissipating the thick mists of ignorance by the lamp of truth. Let us then at once tear away the mask which conceals from us our ruling vice, that we may recognise its odiousness and detest it with our whole soul.

2. *Diffidence of its cure.*

A second obstacle, liable to retard indefinitely, and even altogether prevent, the cure of our predominant passion, is the fear that all our pains and efforts would prove abortive. This distrust proceeds from pusillanimity. The interior revolts appear to our soul, as the sons of Enac appeared to the timid Israelites—'monsters of the race of giants, compared with whom they were but dwarfs.'[2] It is intimidated, and says to itself what Saul said to David: 'Thou shalt not resist this Philistine, nor fight against him, because thou art too young, and he is a warrior' accustomed 'from his youth'[3] to an ascendancy over thee.

Finally, to authorise and vindicate its sloth, it borrows weapons from the doctors of the Church, objecting with St. Cyril that 'it is impossible to destroy completely the concupiscence of the flesh which is within us;'[4] and with St. Dorotheus, St. Jerome, and St. Leo, 'that we cannot be altogether exempt from the passions,'[5] 'that no one was ever perfectly free from their first movements,'[6] 'and that an immunity from all evil tendencies is a privilege not granted in this life.'[7] Such are the mendacious arguments adduced by us in justification of our dastardly behaviour.

[1] Ps. xxvi. 12. [2] Numb. xiii. 34. [3] 1 Kings xvii. 33.
[4] Against the Anthropomorphites. [5] St. Doroth. Serm.
[6] St. Jerome on Isaias. [7] St. Leo Serm.

Slothful soul, 'your heart is the sport of a vain imagination.'[1] I am as thoroughly convinced of the truth of these maxims of the saints as you are. I own with St. Dorotheus that 'we cannot, while in this life, be exempt from all passion;' but I immediately add with him, 'it is not impossible to resist it.' I admit that St. Bernard had just grounds for saying: 'Whether you wish it, or not, the Jebusite will always remain in the midst of you;' however 'you can conquer, if you cannot exterminate him.' St. Thomas teaches positively that we can moderate and direct the passions towards good, 'though we cannot wholly rid ourselves of them during this life.'[2]

'Attraction to sin,' say St. Dorotheus and St. Augustine, 'is a different thing from sin.'[3] Temptation is not consent. 'The evil,' says St. John Chrysostom, 'consists not in the agitation and efforts of the passion, but in the irregularity of the will,' which yields a criminal consent to the depraved movements of the heart. It is certainly beyond human strength to guarantee one's self entirely from temptation; but it would be a gross and criminal error to pretend that we cannot resist it and refuse it our consent. The Apostle of the Gentiles, whilst complaining that 'he felt another law in his members fighting against the law of his mind,'[4] adds elsewhere, 'I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection.'[5]

Consequently 'we are bound,' says St. John Chrysostom, 'to subjugate and conquer the depraved propensities and vicious inclinations of the flesh; we must subject them to the yoke of reason. But you will ask how can we master the violence of our passions.' How? resumes the same holy doctor. 'We subjugate lions, we tame the

[1] Eccli. xxxiv. 6. [2] St. Thom. 1, q. 95, a. 2. [3] St. Doroth. Serm.
[4] Rom. vii. 23. [5] 1 Cor. ix. 27.

ferocity of their character, and we doubt being able to repress the impetuous motions of concupiscence? What! you would possess more power over animals devoid of reason, than over your rational and immortal soul, excited by the fear of God, and aided by His grace! No; cease to allege such pretexts as these.'

Rather 'let us trust in God.'[1] 'A soul leaning on its Beloved,' says St. Bernard, 'will, like a skilful leader, direct the passions of anger, fear, desire, and joy, which are, as it were, the four wheels on which the chariot of our life turns; it will keep a tight rein on all carnal affections. And who could prevent it? Are not all things easy to one who confides in Him who can do all things? Oh, with what confidence this word inspires me: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." Because those who hope in Him are omnipotent, since all things are possible to him that believes, why should I be the only one to despair of the cure of my predominant passion?' Let us therefore cast aside all distrust; 'let us hope in God,'[2] and with His help we shall surmount this obstacle. Let us 'strive for justice for our soul, and even unto death fight for justice; and God will overthrow our enemies.'[3]

3. *Negligence in applying efficacious remedies.*

The third obstacle to a complete victory over our predominant passion is carelessness in recurring to efficacious remedies, and in laying down for ourselves a safe method of pursuing the spiritual warfare advantageously. We have an indefatigable and skilful adversary to combat, 'who carefully examines our weapons,' says St. Ambrose, 'and then sharpens his darts.' 'He studies

[1] Eccli. xi. 22. [2] Ps. xvii. 32. [3] Eccli. iv. 33.

our habits, tastes, and affections,' adds St. Leo, 'the better to profit by every opportunity of injuring us in those things which possess most attractions for us.' This experienced enemy knows perfectly well 'whom he must tempt to covetousness, gluttony, impurity, or envy. He knows what souls to disturb by anger, to delude by joy, deject by fear, or seduce by admiration.' In a word, he adroitly proportions the exterior temptations to the interior state of the soul; and the more easily to conquer us, he invariably attacks us on our weakest side, and in the way that he knows to be most dangerous to us.

Let us oppose this formidable adversary by adopting the surest and most powerful means of defeating him.

First means.—We must resist, repress, and arrest the first movements of temptation and promptly reduce them to obedience at the first indication of the revolt they endeavour to excite within us. St. Chrysostom gives us this useful counsel: 'The moment you perceive the least disorder in your soul, do not neglect it under pretence that there is as yet but little to fear; anticipate on the contrary the great evils which may result therefrom.' When we perceive a house containing inflammable materials on fire, we at once hasten to extinguish it, although as yet it has caused but little damage. It is not the commencement of the burning which thus excites our vigilance, but the consequences likely to follow from it. Let us then exercise the same vigilance in resisting the first appearances of sin, since in this matter the least delay is dangerous.

This promptitude in opposing the evil ensures to us both victory and peace. But he who, neglecting the first movements of concupiscence, allows them time to fortify,

imprudently conceals a coal of fire in his bosom; he cherishes a perfidious serpent, whose deadly venom he shall soon experience. Are not the commencements of passion so many sparks which threaten us with a tremendous conflagration, and yet we harbour them in our heart! What reckless folly! Ah! rather let us generously extinguish them by trampling them under foot the moment we perceive their first approach.

The second means of subjugating our enemy is to foresee the principal occasions on which he is wont to excite our depraved desires, and to provide against his seductions. 'Let us beware,' says St. Ambrose, 'of allowing ourselves to be surprised by the movements of the passions before reason shall have prepared our mind for them; for it often happens that anger, grief, or fear, crush the soul only because their attacks have been unforeseen. It is great wisdom, therefore, to provide by a watchful vigilance against the attacks of an incipient passion.'

The order and plan to be observed in this spiritual warfare, is to attack first our leading fault. Such is the doctrine of the Abbot Serapion, as related by Cassian in his Conferences. 'Let each of us,' says he, 'examine his heart to discover from which of his passions it is that he experiences the most violent assaults; let him concentrate all his energies to destroy it by the arms of the spirit: when he has courageously vanquished it, he will afterwards triumph over all the others so much the more easily as in that his victory will have given him new strength; whilst the enemy, on the contrary, shall be dejected and weakened by the defeat.' Thus it is that this holy war, begun and sustained with prudence, shall be crowned with the happiest success. Such was the

method adopted by the athletes in the public games when, animated by the presence of an earthly monarch, or the hope of a perishable glory and a transitory reward, they combated wild beasts in the amphitheatre. Their first and most vigorous assaults were directed against the strongest and most ferocious animals, being convinced that, having once vanquished them, those which were less formidable would be easily disposed of. Let us display equal skill in the war with our passions by always endeavouring, first of all, to subdue that which is most dangerous. But in order completely to subjugate our predominant passion, it is necessary to trace it to its origin and cause. 'The most effectual method of causing the decay and death of an unfruitful tree, whose branches suffocate the good seed confided to the earth,' says the Abbot Serapion, in Cassian's Conferences, 'is to discover and cut off the roots whence it derives its life. To arrest a torrent which devastates the country we dry up or exhaust its source. So it is with the passions which predominate in us: in order to conquer and subject them we must try to discover the principal one, and we shall easily succeed in extirpating even their deepest roots. For this reason,' continues the same author, 'to conquer negligence, we must first banish sadness, which is its source; to remove sadness, we must resist anger, of which it is the fruit; to extinguish anger, we must subdue avarice and ambition—that is, the thirst for riches and honours—whose privation is generally the cause of our irritation; for in retrenching the cause we prevent the effects: consequently when such of our passions as are the root and stem of the others have been destroyed, their withered branches will fall off of themselves, and will cease to

overspread our hearts with their dark and baneful shade.'

Let us then, faithfully and unfalteringly, employ these means, and thus we shall be able to break the triple and infernal chain which keeps us enslaved under the thraldom of our predominant passion. I allude to the persistency in disguising that passion from ourselves, diffidence of its cure, and negligence in the application of appropriate remedies.

Let us ascend to God on the wing of hope, acknowledge the malice of our capital defect, snatch from it the empire it has usurped, and compel it to adorn our triumph.

CHAPTER V.

OF HUMAN RESPECT.

WHERE shall we find words sufficiently strong to express how great an obstacle human respect is to the acquisition of solid virtue? The property of this monstrous vice, the offspring of hell, is to ruin virtuous actions in their source. Like another Bel, whom a superstitious people were unable to satiate with provisions, never does it weary of devouring souls. Human respect, claiming for its odious maxim, 'What will men say of it?' the rank of a divinity, imposes its worship on mortals who are blind enough to sacrifice to it. Behold, then, the abominable idol which Satan presents to us, and which we consent to adore. Following the example of Daniel and with equal generosity, let us tear away the mask from this vain phantom, and publicly expose the folly, tyranny, and impiety of its worship. Let us adopt the means of annihilating it in ourselves, and, above all, spurn the fear of

this impotent god with whom they menace us. Like Bel, 'it is but clay within and brass without.'[1]

Article I.

Of the folly of human respect.

1. *It causes us to prefer dross to gold.*

Human respect, which is a very serious obstacle to solid virtue, is an inordinate desire of pleasing creatures, and a cowardly fear of displeasing them, to the prejudice of our duties. Most frequently it is to escape their censure and secure their favour that we consent to evil and neglect good. And yet can we picture to ourselves anything more absurd than to be afraid of appearing virtuous, lest we displease the wicked at the risk of grieving the good; than to blush now at a good action which merits a degree of glory for us in eternity; and, on the contrary, to pride ourselves on one which, on a future day, must cover us with everlasting infamy? than to fear the railleries of the world, whose inconsistency is so well known to us, more than the judgments of God, whose equity we adore? than to sacrifice a diamond for a worthless bauble, an endless happiness for the fleeting favour of men? than to offend God 'who hath poised with three fingers the bulk of the earth,'[2] for the sake of humouring man whose life is but 'a vapour which quickly vanisheth?'[3] than to relinquish the care of our salvation because countless fools think fit to destroy themselves? Once more, what an infatuation!

Answer candidly, you who are the ambitious slave of a vain popularity: would you presume to despise a rich, powerful, and munificent friend, in order to win the

[1] Dan. xiv. 6. [2] Isaias xl. 6. [3] James iv. 15.

favour of a man devoid of influence, a miserable beggar covered with rags and ulcers? would you offend a king to ingratiate yourself with his servant? Fools that we are! We forget that there is an infinitely greater disparity between God and us than between a powerful monarch and the vilest of his subjects, and yet we have the hardihood to offer an insult to this adorable Being, which we would not presume to offer to a fellow-creature! We outrage God, from whom we have received all, on whom alone we depend; God, who at the very moment that we offend Him, could annihilate us, as we destroy the insect which crawls beneath our feet: we prefer to please a man, a worm of the earth, who is of himself but impotence, poverty, and misery, and thus deliberately expose ourselves to the irreparable loss of an inestimable treasure.

2. *Of two evils, it causes us to choose the greater*

Were a rich merchant sure of losing a considerable profit in his trade by neglecting this good action which you omit through fear of displeasing a friend, do you imagine he would sacrifice his interests for so frivolous a motive? You believe that the least degree of grace is infinitely preferable to all that is most precious here below; you are aware that it is of incomparably more value for eternity than all the treasures of earth; that all the torments that can be endured here do not equal the pains you shall have to undergo for having neglected to labour for your spiritual advancement; and yet, through deference to a man who is but 'dust and nothingness,'[1] you cease to strive after perfection, and expose yourself to the punishment that must follow

[1] Isaias xl. 17.

your cowardice. Great God If we feared the sting of an insect more than the destruction of our house, the loss of a limb more than the horrors of famine, people would regard us as insane, but, madmen that we are! of what folly are we not guilty when, to escape a raillery, a word of censure, the passing humiliation of a sneer, we wound our soul by sin?—we despise grace, and accumulate coals of fire on our head. Lord, 'I beseech Thee, take away the iniquity of Thy servant, for I have done foolishly'[1] when I preferred the favour of man to Thy grace.

Article II.

Of the tyranny of human respect.

1. *It keeps us in a degrading servitude.*

The shame which prevents us from doing good is not only a great weakness, it is also an unworthy subjection to an unjust tyranny; for, can we imagine anything more intolerable, more degrading to a free man, than forcibly to submit his will to the exactions of another? —than for a being endowed with reason to be seduced into the path of error?—than for a child of God, bound to follow the holy inspirations of virtue, meanly to model himself on the vices of the wicked? What more repugnant to a noble or generous nature than to change his conduct at the whim of his censors, who will condemn to-morrow what they exact to-day?—than to submit to the caprices of men whose will, like the weather-cock, changes every hour?—than to abandon to them the success of the affair which is of all others the most important, the salvation of our immortal soul,

[1] 1 Paralip. xxi. 8.

despite the lights of faith, our remorse of conscience, and the menaces of the sovereign Judge?—than to consent to all their desires when there is question of the honour and glory of God, whilst we easily shake off their tyrannical yoke the moment there is danger of forfeiting the patronage and favour of some great man whose opulence and power command our respect and fear. Yes, it is the acme of degradation that man, the most perfect of created beings, the child of God, the heir of heaven, should become the slave, not of a mighty monarch, but of a man who is but his equal; that he should leave to him the disposal not of his fortune but of his soul; that, by a senseless abdication, he should resign to him his reason and his liberty, the most precious prerogatives of his condition; that he should sacrifice to the despicable malice of a pitiful buffoon the esteem which he formerly enjoyed and which his virtue had won for him; so that, 'sold henceforward under sin, he no longer does the good that he wills but the evil which he hates.'[1]

2. *It deprives us of innumerable heavenly gifts.*

History has handed down the names of tyrants so bereft of humanity as to compel innocent persons to renounce their property, to immolate their children, and to cast themselves into fiery furnaces with exterior demonstrations of joy. The fate of those unfortunate victims elicits our compassion. And yet, wretched that we are, the thought, '*What will men say to it?*' at whose shrine we sacrifice, exercises no less cruelty upon us; with equal barbarity does it force us to renounce innumerable degrees of grace and glory; 'to dash our

[1] Rom. vii. 14, 15.

own children,' that is, our good desires and holy resolutions, 'against the rock of scandal,'[1] and finally precipitate ourselves with an insane joy into the flames of purgatory.

Sometimes, it is true, groaning under the weight of our chains, we cry out with St. Paul: 'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'[2] who will sever the bonds of human respect which hold me captive? Enlightened by the rays of grace, we often perceive the means we should adopt 'to deliver ourselves from the servitude of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God;'[3] nevertheless, fascinated by some ill-starred spell, we remain captives beneath its oppressive thraldom. How deserving of pity are we, therefore, since human respect, like an inexorable despot, deprives us not only of our reason and our liberty, but even of the desire to break our fetters. Oh, 'who shall pluck my feet out of the snare'[4] spread before my path? who will rescue me from this galling servitude? Grant, O my God, that henceforth I may deem it 'a very small thing to be judged by any man whatsoever.'[5]

Article III.

Of the impiousness of human respect.

1. *It is a sacrilegious contempt of God.*

Human respect renders us guilty of a monstrous impiety. Disengaging our hearts from all earthly things, let us raise our thoughts to heaven, and we shall be able duly to appreciate the baseness of regulating our conduct by the culpable desire of pleasing the world. This

[1] Ps. cxxxvi. 9. [2] Rom. vii. 24. [3] Rom. viii. 21.
[4] Ps. xxiv. 15. [5] 1 Cor. iv. 3.

action which you now perform to satisfy men, through a cowardly obsequiousness to their judgment, is an iniquity which the infinite sanctity of God rejects, which His adorable justice condemns, and His infallible wisdom spurns. Such is the irrevocable decree of the three persons of the Blessed Trinity, a decree subscribed by the Blood of Jesus Christ, and whose equity the whole court of heaven adores. And yet, notwithstanding all this, a wretched, insignificant man, sprung from the slime of the earth, whose mind is the prey of error, and whose will is depraved, presumes to raise his head above the filth of his sins in order to oppose his haughty reason to the judgment of God, to vaunt counsel, and commend the same deed as an act of virtue.

Christian soul, make your choice. Behold yourself a spectacle to angels and to men, who anxiously await your final decision. Your Angel Guardian exhorts you to follow the inspirations of grace; the saints conjure you to do so; the divine Mercy solicits your co-operation by its promises, and the divine Justice incites you to it by its threats. Meantime a man, your equal, one whom you have no reason to fear, and with whom you are perhaps on terms of familiarity, opposes your compliance with the suggestions of the Holy Spirit, and you would allow the fear of his sarcasms and railleries to cause you to infringe upon an express command of God!

Once more, for whom will you decide? Whom will you obey? What! you hesitate? . . . Will you then despise the Holy Trinity, whose adorable will you trample under foot; will you give the preference to a miserable worm?—for, what is man compared with God? 'Yes,' you say, 'I will obey man.' What a fatal delusion! Only think of it. The opinion of your perfidious

friend is false and variable, and he will speedily censure the very action to which he now impels you. You yourself shall regard it as folly at the hour of death. At the last judgment the whole universe, your seducer included, shall condemn and reprove your conduct. 'No matter about all this, I wish to gratify my friend.' Such is your reply. Impious man! What! you will prefer the insensate caprice of a mere nothing to the most holy will of the Sovereign Master? . . . 'Yes, I am determined to do so.' But reflect that in doing this action to please the wicked, you attract the reproaches of the good, whose censure is more to be apprehended than the praise of sinners is to be coveted. 'It is of little consequence,' do you answer, 'that I offend God, provided I do not displease this man; that I outrage Jesus Christ, draw upon me the indignation of Heaven, incur the odium of the good, provided my friends are satisfied, provided I escape the ridicule and win the favour of the wicked.' Such is the language, not of your lips, but of your deeds. Oh, heavens! which is the more deserving of astonishment, the unheard-of insolence of the creature, or the ineffable longanimity of the Creator?

My God! to believe that you can do us more good or more detriment than all creatures, to glory publicly in adoring you as our earliest benefactor, in loving you as our Father, in hoping in you as the source of all blessings, in tending towards you as our last end, and yet at this same moment to insult, wound, and irritate you by our disobedience; to prefer to you a man who is but 'rottenness and a worm,'[1] and very frequently to be guilty of this conduct through no other motive than a base human respect, through a mere malice uninfluenced

[1] Job xxv. 6.

by any fear or hope, without any other object than to avoid disobliging one of our fellow-creatures, a man, a worm of the earth, to whom we are under no obligations; without deriving thence any benefit for ourselves, or for our neighbour. And we observe this conduct, the baseness and injustice of which is obvious to us, at the very moment that, without any merit on our part, we are the objects of God's special predilection, loading us, as He does, with such signal marks of His love in preference to so many others!

That the worshippers of false gods should bend the knee before the sacrilegious idol of human respect is conceivable; but that the disciples of the Gospel should dread the derision of the impious more than the martyrs have feared the rage of tyrants; that Christians, who are obliged, in defence of the faith, resolutely to brave the sword and the scaffold; that religious who, in the fervour of the cloister, burn with an ardent desire to suffer torments and death for Jesus Christ, should basely tremble at the mere word: 'What will men say of it?' that they should blush at virtue in presence of their peers, through a chimerical fear of incurring their contempt; that they are not ashamed to purchase human friendship at the price of the friendship of God, well does this crime deserve that the Lord should retaliate by the infliction of the tremendous chastisement with which He threatens us in His Gospel: 'He that shall deny me before men, shall be denied before the Angels of God; and he that shall be ashamed of me, of him the Son of man shall be ashamed, when He shall come in His majesty.'[1] Now we in some manner deny and are ashamed of this Saviour-God every time that we un-

[1] Luke xii. 9.

gratefully commit evil or omit good; for to dissemble our religious sentiments through fear of the derision of libertines, to conceal the horror with which vice inspires us, lest we should seem the friends of virtue, is not this to blush at the Gospel, though in our hearts we believe in Jesus Christ? Is it not to reject in practice His doctrine which we accept in theory? Is it not, in fine, to be Christians in word, but apostates in deed?

2. *It is a species of idolatry.*

There is no crime which bears a closer affinity to the exterior worship of idols than human respect. The nations 'have worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator,'[1] and it is in this subversion of order that the Apostle makes all the malice of idolatry to consist. But are those less culpable who, sooner than displease their friends, offend the infinite majesty of God? Do they not prefer the slime of the earth to heaven, and serve the creature rather than the Creator?'[2] It matters little that this preference be but exterior, and that interiorly they render to God that honour which is His due. The apostates who burned incense before Jupiter, frequently continued to adore Jesus Christ in their hearts; and yet they were not exonerated from the greatest of crimes, because, whilst believing as Christians, they behaved as pagans. He who commits sin through human respect incurs the same reproach. By his conduct he publicly attests (without interiorly believing it, which would be a fearful blasphemy), that the friend whose gratification he seeks is more estimable than God; that he must be pleased even at the expense of displeasing God; that the pleasure of sinning to gratify

[1] Rom. i. 25. [2] Ibid.

his friend amply indemnifies him for the punishments and eternal loss he shall sustain. Human respect, as well as avarice, to which it bears so close a relation, may be termed a real 'service of idols.'[1] Can we then conceive any malady more pernicious to our souls, or whose symptoms are more alarming?

3. *It is the cause of the destruction of the human race and of the death of Jesus Christ.*

We have just demonstrated that human respect is a sacrilegious contempt of God and a species of idolatry, but we have not yet reached the limits of its malice. The history of the human race recalls two terrible events prepared and consummated by this fearful vice: the great catastrophe which marked the primordial days of man in the garden of delights and the bloody immolation of Calvary. What a spectacle! The first scene presents to us Adam and Eve exiled from the terrestrial Paradise, driven thence without the vestige of a hope of return, and 'Cherubim armed with a flaming sword placed at the gate of Eden to guard its entrance.'[2]

Let us here reflect on the fatal consequences of this proscription; the abysses of hell opened, the gates of heaven closed, the earth deluged with evils: with countless calamities which oppress men, let us inquire what enemy has thus instantaneously compassed the ruin of our happiness, robbed us of our right to the heavenly inheritance, and rendered us the slaves of hell.

It is the human respect which induced Adam to eat the forbidden fruit through the fear of displeasing his companion that has let loose all these evils upon us. Human respect is the cruel robber which has attacked

[1] 2 Coloss. iii. 5. [2] Gen. iii. 24.

the human race, figured by the traveller to Jericho, has despoiled it of divine grace, its immortality, its justice, and the empire over its passions, has 'covered it with wounds and left it half dead,' and which, in exchange for so many pilfered blessings, has poured forth as a torrent on the world death, sin, the rebellion of the senses and of concupiscence. But these misfortunes, awful as they are, sink into insignificance in presence of the tragic event of Calvary. Let us contemplate the only Son of the Eternal Father, fastened with three nails to an infamous gibbet, placed between two thieves, abandoned by all, basely calumniated, bruised all over His body, and expiring with a loud cry amidst excruciating tortures. Oh, heavens! what ferocious wild beast has thus devoured the Innocent? What tyrant has laid his inhuman hands upon Him?

The Angels of peace reply, 'weeping bitterly:' 'Man is the enemy who hath done this,'[1] human respect is the 'wild beast,'[2] which in the person of Pilate committed this deicide. The desire of conciliating the favour of the Jews, the fear of displeasing Cæsar, are the merciless ministers which delivered up this innocent Victim to the infuriated populace; they are the executioners who scourged the Saviour, preferred Barabbas to Him, and nailed Him to the cross. Oh, fearful, unheard-of, inconceivable crime! at the sight of which the sun is darkened, the rocks split, and the earth trembles and totters on its foundations. No, never was the utter malice and tyranny of human respect so palpably manifested.

Pilate himself acknowledges the innocence of this man whom the priests have brought before his tribunal; he knows that it is 'for envy they have delivered Him;'[3]

[1] Matt. xiii. 28. [2] Gen. xxxvii. 33. [3] Matt. xxvii. 18.

he declares publicly that 'he finds no cause of death in Him.'[1] He even 'seeks to release Him;'[2] 'but the Jews cry out: If thou release this man thou art not Cæsar's friend.'[3] At this cry Pilate loses his self-control, he ceases to obey the dictates of justice. 'He brings Jesus forth, and sits down in the judgment-seat,'[4] 'and being willing to satisfy the people,'[5] he releases to them Barabbas 'and delivers up Jesus Christ to be crucified.'[6]

Thus, the moment that human respect has been placed in the scale, the moment its impious voice and the decree of a maddened people have imposed it on Pilate, that moment the love of justice, the fear of the future, the lights and the remorse of his own conscience vanish. He is deaf to the warnings of his wife, and steels himself against the apprehensions she has conceived of the future chastisements to be inflicted by the Messiah: so potent and ruthless a tyrant is human respect!

Come now, therefore, pusillanimous souls, who yield to the fear of a vain ridicule; ascend the summit of Calvary, approach the foot of the Cross, and measure by the height of that infamous gibbet the malignity of this pernicious vice. Alas! you abhor it in Pilate, yet nurture it in your heart: you sacrifice your soul to the same idol to which this iniquitous judge immolated the Son of God, but with this tremendous difference, that you commit the crime, notwithstanding your faith and your conviction of its enormity. What audacity!

We cannot be astonished, therefore, when one day the Sovereign Judge, laying aside the meekness of the lamb to assume the fury of the lion, and confiding His vengeance to the care of devouring flames, shall thus insultingly address the slaves of human respect: 'Where are

[1] Luke xxiii. 22. [2] John xix. 12. [3] Ibid.
[4] John xix. 13. [5] Mark xv. 15. [6] Luke xxiii. 25.

now your gods in whom you trusted,'[1] whose favour you have preferred to my grace? 'Let them arise and help you,' let them rescue you from the hands of my omnipotence, which you have so frequently provoked rather than incur their displeasure. Can we be astonished, I say, if those who during life set more value on the esteem of men than on the approbation of God shall not participate after death in the suffrages of the Church, of which they have rendered themselves unworthy? Let us thence conclude how pernicious to man is this vice and how odious to God.

'Lord, Thou hast power of life and death and leadest down to the gates of death and bringest back again,'[2] before whom 'the whole world is as the least grain of sand in the balance.'[3] Alas! what have I done when, through fear of ridicule, or a desire of praise, I omitted good or committed evil; when, rather than grieve a friend, 'who is but a drop of the morning dew,' 'I have offended Thee who couldst destroy both body and soul in hell.'[4] But I resolve with all the strength of my reason, with all the power of my will, to overthrow and tread under foot the sacrilegious idol 'What will men say of it?' which human respect has enthroned in my heart. 'May my right hand forget its cunning and my tongue cleave to my palate,' rather than that I should do or say aught savouring of its worship. Henceforth my only ambition shall be to please Thee, O Lord, my only fear that of offending Thee.

Article IV.

Of the remedies for human respect.

Human respect consists, as we have already stated, in an over-solicitude to please and an abject fear of dis-

[1] Deut. xxxii. 37. [2] Wisd. xvi. 13. [3] Wisd. xi. 23. [4] Matt. x. 28.

pleasing men. This vice is therefore the offspring of our pride, which inspires us to dread the contempt and to ambition the esteem of our fellow-creatures. It is a twofold weakness to which we may trace the greater number of our faults, and to which we must apply a twofold remedy: contempt for the judgments of men, and fear of those of the Almighty. Provided with this double armour we shall easily vanquish the vain phantom: 'What will men say of it?'

1. *Contempt for the judgments of men.*

We need but examine closely the absurdity of human opinions to imbibe a thorough conviction of their worthlessness and to appreciate them at their value. Let us but reflect who are 'those gods of the hills,'[1] those 'sons of Titan, those tall giants,'[2] whose whims form the rule of our conduct. They are men like ourselves, sometimes our equals and often our inferiors; the dupes of ignorance and error, fickle in their affections, contemptible for their vices and dangerous for their bad example. Let us make a *resumé*.

Those men whom you fear, and for love of whom you violate the divine law, wound your soul, and exasperate your God, are mortals like yourself, formed of the same slime, subject to the same miseries, and destined like you to be the food of worms. They are your neighbours, your companions, your intimate friends; you possibly possess an indisputable superiority over them in point of wisdom, virtue, and knowledge.

What! you dread their caprices, you worship their will, you writhe beneath their words as a slave under the lash of his master, you respect their opinions, you

[1] 3 Kings xx. 28. [2] Judith xvi. 8.

fear their judgments! And all this, though you are aware that they regard you with pity as a man of little worth, are perfectly indifferent about your ideas of them, that they despise and disdain all that you say. To what a humiliating subjection have you debased your soul! They do not concern themselves the least as to whether their conduct please or displease you; but since they treat you with so little deference, why are you so obsequiously submissive to them?—why offend God to please them?—and why cease to be good for their sake, since they do not cease to be wicked for yours? Their rights over you do not exceed yours over them. Why, then, comply with their whims? Since you believe their capabilities inferior to yours, and in every other matter confide less in them than in yourself, why relinquish to them the regulation of your conduct?—why sacrifice your judgment to them in the most important of all affairs? Since you can without presumption esteem yourself better than they, why not believe yourself more prudent? Courage, then, a noble pride is permitted you; cast off the shameful yoke of human respect; repay the unjust contempt of your scoffers by a similar contempt; laugh in turn at those who laugh at you. Assuredly you are as good as they, and your position is not inferior to theirs.

2. You can disdain their opinion all the more freely in that not only they are not more enlightened than you, but also because falsehood and error sway their judgment. Thus it is the most virtuous that form the special object of their malevolent derision; whilst libertines and those who have cast off the restraint of duty and religion elicit their admiration and applause. Shunning the society of the fervent, they court that of

the tepid; they condemn virtue and favour vice, censure what is good and commend what is evil. 'They call evil good, and good evil! they put darkness for light, and light for darkness; they put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.'[1] 'Their wisdom is but foolishness with God.'[2] Their sentiments are in opposition to those of Jesus Christ. Will you select such men as the directors of your conduct?

How you are to be pitied! What! you are not always able to preserve yourself from certain doubts against the truths of faith, and you have the folly to receive their sophisms, maxims and false decrees as so many oracles and an irrefragable rule of morality. Who has thus fascinated you for the purpose of grossly deceiving you? Do we see the learned abandon science because the ignorant despise it? Does a man consent to starve himself to death because a fool pretends that the meat has been poisoned? Does a person throw away a piece of money because one who is inexperienced assures him it is tin?

And you neglect the science of the saints, the nutriment of your soul, the practice of virtue, because worthless men choose to ridicule them.

3. But this is not all. Those severe censors are most variable in their judgments. The same man whom they laud to the stars to-day they will overwhelm with insults, and, if possible, humble to the dust to-morrow; they will censure in him what they now approve, and their hero of the eve must almost infallibly expect to be their laughing-stock next day. It is not reason but the passion of the moment that influences their decisions; they accept or reject, praise or criticise, absolve

[1] Isaias v. 20. [2] 1 Cor. iii. 19.

or condemn, according to their own impressions and not according to justice. In a word, temper and the movements of their spleen, which seem to obey all the changes of the atmosphere, are the arbitrators of their opinions.

4. But those judges of your choice are subject to still greater vices than inconstancy, vices which render their lives contemptible in the eyes of men. You know it. You are aware of their evil propensities and predilection for sin, since you believe you cannot succeed in pleasing them except by renouncing the practice of virtue for that of vice.

According to your own avowal you regard them as vicious, as men with whom the maxims of piety rate very low. Nevertheless, you accept their will as an inviolable law, persuade yourself that you ought to model yourself on them, and that their life is a mirror whence virtue is reflected in all its purity.

What folly! These men, your equals, are subject to error, they are volatile and vicious; you acknowledge this, and yet, instead of despising their false opinions, you have the weakness to yield to them, accept them, and glory in them. This is a subversion of reason, a depravity of heart which deserves to be expiated in avenging flames.

You say you admit the inconsistency and unworthiness of your conduct; that you are irritated by this goading servitude; but that 'what can't be cured must be endured;' that you are not the only victim of this disease; that you are compelled to yield to the exigencies of custom; that unless you conform your ideas to those of others you will become the butt of their taunts and railleries.

Blind that you are! But if, pursuing a different line of behaviour, you despise the vain opinions of those slaves of vice, virtuous men will applaud you, Jesus Christ will honour you with His love in presence of the Eternal Father and the whole Court of Heaven. He will acknowledge you as His, and will verify in your favour the promise: 'whosoever shall confess Me before men, I also will confess him before My Father who is in heaven;'[1] before Him with whom neither customs, nor the depravity of the world, nor the number of the delinquents, shall avail as an excuse. You cannot please God and the world, the virtuous and the vicious. Reflect now, and decide by which party you prefer to be rejected—by virtuous men, by Jesus Christ, or by your equals, by headless, unstable, vicious friends, who will one day reverse their own judgment and condemn you for having followed it.

He who wishes to please everyone attempts an impossibility, 'he consumes himself in useless labours.'[2] 'It is impossible to please all men. Though St. Paul made himself all to all, nevertheless he was unable to avoid being frequently condemned or despised'[3] by the world.

Amongst those whom you humour there shall always be some who will be dissatisfied, and whose approbation you will fail to obtain. They are a divided kingdom whose thoughts, sentiments, and affections differ in almost everything: whatever precautions you may take you will displease some by the deference you show to others; you will annoy this one by your anxiety to gratify that other. What do I say? He whose favour you gain to-day by disobliging others will be irritated

[1] Matt. x. 32. [2] Exod. xviii. 18. [3] Imit. b. iii. ch. 36.

against you to-morrow for the most trifling cause. By a just retribution you shall incur not only the disgrace of the virtuous, to whom you have preferred your impious and unprincipled friends, but you shall likewise be cast off by those very friends who are as irreligious as yourself, and for love of whom you have sacrificed your innocence and peace of mind.

Be yourself the judge. Is it not absolute folly to worry yourself, to become a martyr to the devil and a slave to the caprices of others; to sully your soul, to grieve the saints, to offend the Divine Majesty for the sake of escaping the injustice of those human opinions which no one, not excepting even Jesus Christ Himself, the Just by excellence, has been able to avoid. What do you think? Is it not an absurdity to expect to escape the criticisms of men? The nobler part to follow is, therefore, generously to contemn their worthless talk, to disdain their vain censures with a holy pride, since you must necessarily submit to them.

And besides, what good or evil can result to you from the opinions of others? What advantage does the sun derive from being an object of worship to the Indians, and what injury does the moon sustain from the infuriate rage of the benighted people who set their dogs baying it? Does gold lose its value because a blind man fails to distinguish it from lead? Does the price set on a piece of glass by an ignorant person invest it with the value of a precious stone? Should a valet be mistaken for a king, is he thereby entitled to the throne? If you are wicked you continue so, how much soever men may vaunt your sanctity. If your conscience bears faithful testimony to your being virtuous, you are so notwithstanding the efforts of envy to brand you with vices. 'What thou

art, thou art; nor canst thou be said to be greater than God sees thee to be. Thou art not more holy if thou art praised, nor anything the worse if thou art dispraised.'[1] 'Whether they put a good or bad construction on what thou dost, thou art still what thou art.'[2] 'Fear not, then, the judgment of man,'[3] but generously despise this absurd phantom: 'What will men say? What will they think of me?' Let them say and think what they please; for your part, let it be your sole desire, your one ambition, to be such as God wishes.

Shun this dangerous esteem of the judgments of men which has held such empire over you up to this, since it is the origin of the greater number of your afflictions. When you weary of your employment, are grieved at having some charge imposed on you, complain of an insult or want of kindness, you will find that the real secret of your vexation and anxiety is the effect it may produce on the minds of others concerning you. This thought: 'What will people say?—what idea will they form of me?' is the sole artisan of your crosses; aided by a warped and distorted imagination, it exaggerates them and renders them most irksome and unsupportable to you. Examine your heart, trace to their source the emotions which agitate your soul, and you will find that I am right, that I have laid my finger on the wound.

Would you enjoy perfect peace, the joy of a good conscience, break, bury in a disdainful oblivion the infamous idol: 'What will men say of it?' and beware, lest pride, restoring it to life, succeed in reinthroning it on the altar of your heart. You will speedily experience what strength contempt for the judgment of men imparts for the conquest of human respect.

[1] Imit. b. ii. ch. 6. [2] Ibid. b. iii. ch. 28. [3] Ibid. ch. 36.

2. *Fear of the judgment of God.*

A second and still more effectual means than contempt of the judgments of men for conquering human respect is a solid and deep-rooted fear of the tremendous judgments which the Son of man shall exercise at the end of the world, when 'He will come in the clouds of heaven in great power and majesty.'[1]

1. The Apostle of the Gentiles, in the fervour of his zeal for his own sanctification and the instruction of others, could devise no more powerful antidote against human respect than the remembrance of this awful event. 'But to me,' says he, 'it is a very small thing to be judged by you, or by man's day; but He that judgeth me is the Lord.'[2] No, it is not a man, our equal, subject to error, weak, inconstant, vicious, who is to judge us; it is the Lord, the 'Lord Almighty,'[3] 'who has none like unto Him among the gods,'[4] 'in whose hands is all wisdom,'[5] 'who is always the self-same,'[6] 'glorious in holiness,'[7] 'strong in power;'[8] 'whose wrath no man can resist,'[9] 'who can destroy and deliver.'[10] This omnipotent God will rise up against those who, for the sake of human friendship, have despised His grace. 'He will cite them alive before His tribunal; He will condemn and chastise them; He shall pour out His indignation like fire'[11] upon them.

'Then the heavens shall reveal the iniquity' and the folly of human respect, 'and the earth shall rise up against the impious'[12] worshippers of this disgraceful idol.

Enlightened by the lamp of eternity, those unhappy souls shall themselves behold the vanity of human

[1] Matt. xxiv. 30. [2] 1 Cor. iv. 3. [3] Judith xvi. 20. [4] Ps. lxxxv. 8. [5] Wisd. vii. 16. [6] Ps. ci. 28. [7] Exod. xv. 11. [8] Eccli. xv. 19. [9] Job ix. 13. [10] James iv. 12. [11] Jerem. Lam. ii. 4. [12] Job xx. 27.

opinions. Filled with confusion and trembling in every limb, they shall recognise the senseless injustice of their conduct when they chose to offend God rather than disoblige a worm of the earth; when they displeased Him to gratify a false friend.

2. At this moment the Sovereign Judge, 'clad with zeal as with a cloak,[1] manifesting His majesty by the voice of His thunder,'[2] shall mockingly ask those base slaves of the world: 'Where are now your gods in whom you trusted? Let them arise and help you, and protect you in your distress.'[3] Behold, now, to 'whom you have likened me and made me equal,'[4] and beneath whom you have debased me. It is time to confess that 'I alone am, and there is no other God beside me. If I shall whet my sword as the lightning, and my hand take hold on judgment,' who shall resist me? 'I will render vengeance, I will make my arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour you, and there is none that can deliver you out of my hand.'[5] 'It is thus that God shall thunder forth His justice.'[6]

Ah, hapless soul! what shall be your dismay when the divine wrath breaks forth; 'when the Almighty' lets loose His vengeance 'upon you as swelling waves,' when, abandoned by those very friends for love of whom you have so often offended the Divine Majesty, you find yourself doomed to bear alone the whole brunt of His implacable anger; when, 'like a lion in his den,'[7] He seizes and destroys you without your being capable of offering the least resistance. What shall be your sentiments concerning human respect when Jesus Christ, the Sun of Justice, withdraws His light from you for ever;

[1] Isaias lix. 17. [2] Job xxxvii. 4. [3] Deut. xxxii. 37. [4] Isaias xlvi. 5. [5] Deut. xxxii. 39. [6] Job xxxvii. 5. [7] Ps. ix. 30.

when Mary, the Star of Peace, and the saints, the brilliant luminaries of the heavenly kingdom, refuse to shine upon you, and the rays of grace cease to enlighten you? What esteem will you wish to have set on the opinions of men during life? Above all, when you behold those, whose errors formed the rule of your conduct, 'troubled with terrible fear in seeing and experiencing this revenge,' cry out, 'we have erred from the way of truth, and the way of the Lord we have not known.' When you see those whose sarcasms decided your actions exclaiming, amid groans of anguish: Alas! 'these are they whom we had some time in derision' for their modesty and virtue. 'Fools that we were, we esteemed their life madness and their end without honour; behold how they are numbered amongst the children of God, and their lot is among the saints.'[1] They shall 'shine as the brightness of the firmament and as stars for all eternity.'[2] Oh, how great was their wisdom in despising our ridicule and contempt. What an idea shall you then form of your old idol, 'What will men say of it?' What desolation, what fear shall take possession of your soul? What will you desire to have done?

3. But all those horrors are but the beginning of the consternation with which your soul shall be seized when the Divine Judge executes the awful threats pronounced by Him in the Gospel: 'He that shall deny me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven.'[3] 'He that shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He shall come in His majesty, and that of His Father, and of the holy angels.'[4] Now, we have already proved that the slaves of human respect in some manner deny

[1] Wisd. v. 2, and fol. [2] Dan. xii. 3. [3] Matt. x. 33. [4] Luke ix. 26.

Jesus Christ and are ashamed of Him; consequently the Saviour in His turn will disown them, on the dreadful day of retribution, in presence of the universe, of the angels and saints, and before His Eternal Father.

What shall then be our confusion and terror on seeing ourselves insultingly disowned by Him on whom alone our salvation depends? What our desolation when He who constitutes all our glory is ashamed of us? As we involuntarily turn away our eyes from those who are a subject of dishonour to us, and reluctantly tolerate their presence, so in like manner shall Jesus Christ avert from us the eyes of His mercy, and loathingly spurn us from His Sacred Heart. 'Can we sustain the rigour of this coldness,'[1] this crushing contempt? particularly when knocking at the door of the heavenly espousals, it remains closed against us despite our entreaties, and the Divine Bridegroom, who so well knows and loves those who belong to Him, answers: 'I know you not,'[2] I know not this man.'[3] Would we escape so dire a misfortune let us 'fear God,'[4] let us dread His judgments, for this holy fear is the most salutary remedy for human respect.

Let us now descend into the depths of our soul, and carefully scrutinise the secret springs of our actions.

1. Have we not forgotten the maxim of the wise man: 'He that feareth man shall quickly fall;'[5] and the reproach of the Prophet: 'They trembled for fear where there was no fear.'[6] Have we not often done wrong for the sake of pleasing others, or omitted to do good for fear of displeasing them? If such be the case, 'know that for all these faults God will bring thee into judgment.'[7] Let us correct ourselves while we have still time, and

[1] Ps. cxlvii. 6. [2] Matt. xxv. 12. [3] Ibid. xxvi. 72. [4] Prov. iii. 7.
[5] Prov. xxix. 25. [6] Ps. lii. 6. [7] Eccl. xi. 9.

anticipate in our particular examen the various opportunities that will occur for combating human respect.

2. Do we firmly believe that 'no man can serve two masters,'[1] Jesus Christ and the world? that 'whoever will be a friend of this world becometh an enemy of God?'[2] that 'if I pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ?'[3] 'God shall scatter the bones of them that please men?'[4] Emulating the example of ambitious courtiers, have we not sought to win human favour by studied attentions, fulsome flattery, servile adulation, and worldly manners? Worthless shall our vanity prove to us, for the prize we so eagerly covet 'is as dust which is blown away with the wind, and as a thin froth which is dispersed by the storm, and a smoke that is scattered abroad by the wind.'[5] Like the dog in the fable, if the comparison be permitted me, we relinquish the reality to pursue the shadow; we sacrifice eternal for perishable goods. Let us rather be wise enough to forego the favour of men.

3. Are we practically persuaded of the truth of this maxim of Jesus Christ, 'Fear ye not them that kill the body and are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him that can destroy both soul and body into hell.'[6] 'I say to you, my friends: Fear Him only who after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell, yea, I say, fear Him.'[7] Have we resolutely resolved to incur the hatred of the whole world? to become a target for the railleries, derision, and contempt of our friends? to be shunned and excluded from their society rather than offend God, were it only by a venial sin? What! do we hesitate? Let us hearken to the words of Ecclesiasticus and Jeremiah:

[1] Matt. vi. 24. [2] James iv. 4. [3] Gal. i. 10. [4] Ps. lii. 6. [5] Wisd. v. 15. [6] Matt. x. 28. [7] Luke xii. 4, 5.

'Be not ashamed of what I am about to say to you, and accept no person to sin thereby;'[1] 'for cursed be he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm,'[2] and who under this deceitful protection offends his Creator.

4. Does not the coldness, estrangement, and aversion of others pain and distress us? Does it not irritate and chafe our self-love? But why regret that which may preserve us from illusion and numberless annoyances? Why regret being excluded from society, the privation of which will one day constitute our joy? 'Is not God better to thee than ten,'[3] than a thousand friends or companions addicted to error, inconstancy, and vice? Rather let us rejoice 'if the world hate us:' it is a sign that Jesus Christ 'has chosen us out of the world; for if we had been of the world, the world would love its own; but because we are not of the world, therefore the world hateth us.'[4] Rejoice also, for the world 'hath hated Jesus Christ before you;'[5] 'and the disciple is not above the master.'[6] It is a glorious thing for us to be treated in the same manner as our God was treated. Finally, let us console ourselves by the reflection that the transient contempt of tepid and irreligious men is amply compensated for by the permanent esteem of the elect both of heaven and of earth. Moreover, those who now ridicule us will learn their mistake when death arrives, but particularly on the last day, when they shall be compelled to applaud our virtue and courage.

Instead of fearing the jeers of those who mock us, let us bear their taunts confidently, and calmly for a few days, and we shall have conquered. They themselves will at length eulogise us; and whilst they had but little

[1] Eccli. xlii. 1. [2] Jerem. xvii. 5. [3] 1 Kings i. 8.
[4] John xv. 19. [5] John xv. 18. [6] Matt. xix. 24.

esteem for us, when we imitated their example, they will approve and honour our conduct when we have ceased to imitate them.

But you will say it is not merely a question of escaping the ridicule of men, we have likewise reason to apprehend their resentment, 'for they will try to injure us if we incur their displeasure. No,' says St. Augustine, 'men can only injure us as far as God permits. Besides, whether we please them or not, they always have the will to injure us; the misfortune of others forms the constant theme of their cogitations. This malevolence is the characteristic of their corrupt nature. What end do you gain therefore by the attentions you lavish on them, except that of offending Him, who to avenge Himself need but abandon you to their power? Whilst God is pleased with you, they are powerless to harm you; but should you irritate Him, their malice shall have unbridled sway.'

In obedience then, to the advice of the Apostle, let us resist the world, let it 'be crucified to us;'[1] let us scorn its ridicule, contemn its judgments, and fear those of God alone. Let us strive 'to live the rest of our time in the flesh, not after the desires of men, but according to the will of God.'[2] If not, woe to us! for it 'is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God;'[3] for 'there is none holy as the Lord is: and there is none strong like our God.'[4] It is He that 'hath power of life and death; and leadeth down to the gates of death, and bringeth back again;'[5] and there 'is none that can escape His hand,'[6] and resist His vengeance. Human respect is infinitely odious to this omnipotent God; let us then cast it far from us, and fear His judgments alone.

[1] Gal. iv. 14. [2] 1 Pet. iv. 2. [3] Heb. x. 31.
[4] 1 Kings ii. 2. [5] Wisd. xvi. 13. [6] Tobias xiii. 2.

CHAPTER VI.

Of sloth in rising in the morning.

'WINE drunken with moderation,' says Ecclesiasticus, 'is the joy of the soul and the heart; but wine drunken with excess raiseth quarrels, wrath, and many ruins.'[1] The maxims of Holy Writ may likewise be applied to sleep. When taken moderately, it relaxes the mind and recruits our physical strength; but if prolonged beyond what is needful, it becomes an obstacle to the increase of our merits and perfection, and is perverted into a prolific source of the evils which tyrannise over our soul. How often has not a sad experience taught us that the sensuality and sloth which detain us in bed unnecessarily are the origin of our daily and almost constant faults? It is certain, therefore, that this vice is not one of the least impediments to solid virtue. To animate ourselves to a successful struggle with it, we must consider the disgrace and other baneful effects which result to us from it; and acknowledge that this species of sloth is a very pernicious and shameful sin. We shall conclude this subject by studying the remedies whereby to oppose it.

ARTICLE I.

Sloth in rising is a sin.

First proof.—This species of sloth is a very considerable venial fault. This proposition may be rendered evident by a comparison. 'Know,' says St. Augustine,

[1] Eccli. xxxi. 36 and fol.

and this is likewise the doctrine of St. Gregory[1] and St. Thomas;[2] 'know that it is a venial sin not to stop at what is necessary in eating and drinking.' Now the inference I purpose to draw from these words is, that we also sin venially every time we give more time to sleep than the exigencies of the body require. In effect, since St. Thomas does not hesitate to affirm that 'the disorderly appetite in the use of food is a sin,'[3] it is impossible to exonerate the abuse of sleep from all fault, because the arguments adduced against the first of these irregularities holds equally with regard to the other. 'All sensible and delectable things,' says St. Thomas, 'destined for the use of man, refer to the present life as to their end.' Mark these words, 'All delectable things.' Consequently even sleep should be regulated by our necessity and want; such is the order of Nature, and the end it has in view in the destination of the things of which it allows us the use.

This is a strict and necessary consequence of the principle of St. Thomas, that 'the necessity or wants of the present life should be our absolute rule and constant measure in the use of delectable things.'[4] It is certain, therefore, that everyone who, in defiance of this rule, grants to sleep more than is requisite reverses the order of Nature, opposes its ends, resists the law of reason, and by this very fact incurs guilt. It is a venial sin 'to eat and drink even with moderation, if' solely 'through a motive of pleasure.'[5] This is irrefragably proved by Cardenas, in commenting on the eighth proposition condemned by Innocent XI. He demonstrates that the denial of this truth merited the condemnation of the

[1] Mor. b. 30. [2] St. Thom. 2. 2, q 148, a. 1 & 4.
[3] Ibid. 2. 2, q. 148, a. 1. [4] Ibid. 2. 2, q. 141, a. 6.
[5] Cardenas' Dissert. 8.

proposition quite independently of its other assertions. Is it not evident that it is a sin to sleep merely for pleasure as well as to eat and drink through this motive? True, the lovers of sleep will not want for pretexts to justify their sloth; but their conscience, which will not be silenced, attests that, instead of taking necessity for their rule, they seek only the sweets of sleep and of indolent repose: wherefore we must say of an irregular love of sleep, as well as of the natural appetite for eating and drinking, that it is illicit in its acts when the pleasure found therein constitutes our sole and ultimate motive. The opposite conclusion has been implicitly condemned with the eighth of the propositions of which we have just spoken, since the selfsame reasons militate against it. The pleasure that accompanies sleep is not wrong if referred to a nobler end; but it is not allowable to enjoy it as an absolute and desirable good in itself. It was the appreciation of this truth that inspired Seneca's beautiful reply to the disciple of Epicurus: 'You enjoy the pleasures of life, I, for my part, am satisfied to have the use of them.'

Objection. You allege that to listen to sweet music, to inhale the fragrance of a flower, to enjoy the relaxation of hunting and walking purely for the pleasure these amusements afford is not a fault; therefore, it cannot be wrong to remain in bed longer than we require merely for sensual gratification. I reply in the first place that the proposition on which this objection is based is itself virtually contained in the eighth proposition already quoted and consequently condemned with it. Such is the opinion of Cardenas, who supports it by the authority of St. Thomas.

But even supposing that the opinion on which our

adversaries found the objection were incontrovertible, still the actions they oppose to us differ too materially from that of which there is question here to admit of the same conclusion being applicable to all.

The pleasure found in sleep and food is the means employed by Divine Providence to induce us to make use of them, in order to repair our physical strength. To desire this pleasure directly therefore, to make it our ultimate end, and not to stop at what is necessary, would be to reverse the order of nature. But, on the contrary, relaxation of mind being the proper and direct end which nature proposes to itself in the actions objected against us, we may desire the innocent and beneficial enjoyment found in them, in virtue of, and through the motive of their own utility.

These same actions possess another advantage: the charm of music, for example, is calculated to elevate our hearts above terrestrial thoughts, whilst excess of sleep stupefies the mind and induces sensuality. How vast the contrast, therefore, between these different actions! And even allowing that it were lawful in the first to propose the legitimate pleasure they afford as our actuating motive, would it follow that the unnecessary prolongation of sleep would be exempt from sin? Certainly not, and I persist in maintaining that it is a real fault as well as intemperance in eating and drinking would be.

Second proof. We sin every time that we voluntarily and without sufficient cause do anything that we know is likely to be the occasion of unchaste temptations. All theologians admit this principle of morality. But the slaves of sloth know well by experience that there is danger in remaining too long in bed, particularly when they have ceased to sleep, because it is at that time

especially that the flesh rebels against the spirit, filling it with evil thoughts and sinful reminiscences and imaginations. They sin then if they are in danger of consenting to them, they sin venially or even mortally, according as the danger is remote or proximate. This sloth, as inexcusable as detrimental, since it is deliberate, is the cause of our daily tepidity, which is at least a venial sin, and which considerably diminishes, if it does not rob us altogether of the merit of our actions.

If we love God, if we fear offending Him, if we are truly convinced of the malice, the dreadful effects and the chastisement due to venial sin, let us sincerely detest and manfully strive against the unworthy sensuality which retains us in bed.

Article II.

Sloth is a shameful sin.

1. *Sloth renders us an object of derision to others.*

The slothful man incurs the reprimands of his superiors, the raillery of his equals, and often the contempt of his inferiors, who make no effort to conceal it from him. But what is worse, he becomes the laughing-stock of the devil himself, who exercises a power over the senses, imagination, and faculties of the slothful scarcely inferior to satanic possession. Such is the state of torpor and inertness into which he throws them, that they remain in bed like a mass of lead and almost as incapable of quitting it.

Nailed, so to speak, to his pillow, the sluggard yields himself up completely to sensual enjoyment. Incapable of ascending heavenwards, his thoughts grovel on the earth, while his soul, equally material with his body,

loses all its energy as well as all aspirations after spiritual things.

This miserable state at length becomes an inveterate habit, or rather a second nature, a subject of dishonour to man, whose dignity is so much compromised by this degrading inaction. Justly, therefore, does the victim of this vice forfeit the esteem in which he was hitherto held and reap only humiliation and contempt.

2. *It makes us ashamed of ourselves.*

How can the sluggard fail to be ashamed of himself?

In becoming the slave of sleep he assimilates himself to the brute creation; he yields a degrading submission to the sensuality which predominates over him, and with which he shall reproach himself as soon as he has risen.

Should he make a resolution to resist sloth, the devil, who knows well how to vanquish it on the onset, insultingly derides the perpetual inconstancy of the slothful. Behold the degraded and abject state to which this vice reduces us. How can it fail to inspire us with horror?

Article III.

Sloth is a very pernicious sin.

1. *It injures the success of prayer.*

One of the most baneful consequences of sloth is its effect on prayer, of which it not only causes the ill-success, but frequently the entire omission. Whilst fervent and generous souls, prostrate from early dawn before the throne of God, render to Him a tribute of prayer and praise, the sluggard, lolling lazily in bed, indulges in culpable and luxurious indolence. Or should

human respect rather than the voice of conscience force him to rise, reluctantly tearing himself from the blankets, he repairs to the place of prayer, in which, however, his body alone is present; his soul, weighed down with drowsiness, pays no attention to what it says. Overcome by listlessness and sleep, he throws himself on a chair or form, or else gives free scope to distractions. His thoughts wander through the house and town, they traverse the world from end to end. His prayer is devoid of fruit; he even does himself irreparable injury by his carelessness in this exercise, if indeed he do not altogether omit it.

2. *It is a source of tepidity.*

A second effect of sloth is tepidity, which is directly antagonistic to the perfect love of God, the ruin of all virtues and the origin of all kinds of vices; since it is from it that inattention in offering the Holy Sacrifice, indevotion at the Divine Office, loss of interior recollection, constant dissipation of mind, dislike to solitude and mortifications, intemperance in the use of food, spiteful and injurious words, relaxation of morals, buffoonery at recreation, want of guard over the senses, fear of labour and disgust for rule, take their rise. In fine, tepidity insinuates itself like a subtle poison into all the actions of our life, injuring them to such a degree that instead of meriting treasures of grace and glory for us, they prepare a long and rigorous expiation for us in the other life. What a host of evils for our souls!

3. *It arrests the stream of graces.*

Finally, sloth deprives us of the supernatural lights and inspirations of the Holy Ghost as well as of the special helps, protection, and even guidance of the

Almighty, and of that more special love which induces Him to take His children to His paternal bosom where our innocence is sheltered 'from the arrow that flieth in the day, of the business that walketh about in the dark, of the invasion, or of the noon-day devil.'[1] Delivered up to our own weakness without being proportionately sustained by the hand of God, we fall into the greatest disorders, contradictions with our superiors, disputes with our equals, and shameful carnal temptations till we easily reach the confines of mortal sin.

Experience daily teaches that sloth is a great obstacle to the divine favours. But the disgrace of the Sulamitess as recorded in the Sacred Canticles is also a most striking illustration of this truth. She did not rise promptly when she heard 'the voice of her beloved knocking,' she alleged to herself a thousand frivolous excuses for deferring to open the door, she wished to be entreated before quitting her bed. What anguish and sufferings did not this neglect cost her subsequently. Ashamed and repentant 'she rose at length to open to her beloved;'[2] she opened in effect, but 'He had already turned aside and was gone.'[3] Restless and uneasy 'she sought' this Heavenly Spouse in meditation, but 'she found Him not.' She called Him, but with a voice enfeebled by tepidity, and 'He did not answer her.' Unable longer to endure solitude, she sought the society of creatures and gave herself up to dissipation; she went out, she traversed the city to beg consolation from the daughters of Jerusalem. Hapless being! 'the keepers of the walls,'[2] that is the demons, 'who as roaring lions go about seeking whom they may devour,'[3] struck and wounded her, and finally despoiled her of her mantle, the robe of innocence,

[1] Ps. xc. 6. [2] Cant. v. 2 and fol. [3] 1 Pet. v. 8.

as the Fathers interpret it, with which she was adorned. What multiform misfortunes for this miserable soul!

4. *Answers to the excuses of the slothful.*

Let us beware of assuming with the slothful that every trifling ache and lassitude necessitate our prolonging sleep and are sufficient pleas to exempt us from sin. Sometimes, it is true, we find it needful to give a little more time to sleep than usual; but it is likewise true that self-love often deceives us by magnifying into a necessity what is in reality only an exaction of passion; it construes into physical debility what is merely inactivity of the soul, whilst it qualifies as mental exhaustion what is in reality but pure indolence. Well, then, do we deserve that they should say to us, 'your fever is sloth, your disease sensuality.'

If we would not cruelly deceive ourselves in an affair so important and on which our advancement in virtue in a great measure depends, let us weigh before God the specious pretexts which are usually alleged and which are but too often the vain excuses of an immortified flesh. Generally speaking, our pretended malady has no existence save in our imagination. At other times we regard a trifling indisposition as a serious illness requiring care. It may even happen, as St. Pacomius, St. Teresa, and several other holy persons have experienced, that many of these ailments are but temptations of the devil who disturbs and disarranges our humours, though we regard them as symptoms of fever. These slight illnesses are not cured by prolonging sleep: on the contrary, the best remedy for them is to rise generously and even employ the strokes of the discipline to awaken our slothful flesh.

But even admitting that we are really fatigued, what good can a quarter or half an hour longer in bed do us? Certainly the indisposition must be light indeed that yields to such a cure. 'I am as yet only convalescent,' adds another, 'I very much need repose.' Alas! when human respect is in question, the sacrifice of half an hour costs us but little, and we willingly anticipate our hour for rising though our head continue to ache! Why then should not the love of God have sufficient influence with us to obtain from us half an hour of our rest. Is it not astonishing that this noble and religious motive should have less weight with us than human respect?

'But every morning on awaking, I am bathed in perspiration, and it is dangerous to rise while in this state, particularly if located in a cold, damp room.' The reply is easy, a person remains in bed either to cause the perspiration to dry up, which is prejudicial to health, or to excite it still more: but on this second supposition, is he dispensed from rising? is it a necessity for remaining longer in bed; for when he has continued to excite the perspiration he will at length be obliged to wipe it off; he cannot always keep his head on the bolster, and the room will be as damp at six as at five. Why, therefore, not do at five what you will have to do at six? Then is it becoming in a religious, who is bound to seek for mortification, to be more solicitous for his body than for his soul?

A moment since we were ready to expatriate ourselves and to brave torments and death at the hands of infidels, and now we scarcely venture to lift our head from off the pillow.

To-day we solemnly offer ourselves to God to undertake apostolic labours at the peril of our lives, and to-

morrow the least indisposition retains us in the blankets. Redoubtable athletes whose bed is their arena! formidable antagonists of hell, since the devil needs but a mattress and a bolster to hold us captive in our degrading indolence.

Let us be persuaded that corporal infirmity, as a rule, is but a poor apology for prolonging sleep. Others allege their incapacity for meditation unless their mind be relaxed by long slumbers. This excuse is of about as much value as the preceding. Prometheus-like, there is no form which self-love does not assume to deceive us in this matter.

Habitual promptitude in rising dispels all these clouds; while prolonged sleep, on the contrary, accumulates and deepens them. Nevertheless, if we absolutely require somewhat more sleep, we must select a favourable moment for it, which shall not be prejudicial either to our reason or to our other occupations; let us therefore take a little rest on a chair during the course of the day. You will repose better in bed, do you say? Yes, more comfortably I allow, but not more appropriately. In effect, to consecrate the first-fruits of the day to self-love, sensual enjoyments and the devil; to commence it by venial sin, by contempt of the inspirations of grace and remorse of conscience, by forgetfulness of Jesus Christ, who anxiously solicits us to come and adore Him in the blessed Eucharist; to sacrifice so many degrees of grace and glory to sleep and indolence; to remain buried in slumber when the morning stars already praise the Lord, when so many of our friends, of our companions, and even of seculars, are prostrate before the august Sacrament of the Altar, and assisting at the Holy Sacrifice; when, in fine, labourers and artisans have

begun their daily toil: is not such conduct in a religious bound to obey the first sound of the bell; in a priest destined to offer the adorable Victim of Calvary on that same day, and called to surpass the angels in sanctity, most dangerous, contemptible, and reprehensible?

If we have at heart our sanctity, perfection, and salvation, let us not dispute with duty 'when the hour of rising shall have arrived.'[1] Let us immediately spring out of bed, saying with blessed Berchmans: O God, Creator of the day, may 'I die rather than transgress my rule even in its least important point,' and particularly in the 'article' which obliges me to rise promptly when the appointed hour has come. This fidelity will insure perfect peace and tranquillity to our soul for the remainder of the day.

'Let us not sleep, as others do: but let us watch,'[2] for 'the mercy of the Lord is as the morning cloud, and as the dew that goeth away in the morning'[3] before the rays of the sun; 'it shall leave in dryness'[4] him whom it finds in bed on its passage. 'Darkness shall cover him, and he shall be wrapped up in bitterness.'[5] When the moment of calling comes 'harden not your hearts,'[6] but arise from sleep, 'for behold the Lord will come out of His place to visit you.'[7] 'Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord shall find watching,'[8] and already engaged in prayer when he comes. 'Amen I say to you,'[9] 'He will dispose their hearts to ascend by steps, by which they shall go from virtue to virtue till it shall be granted them to see the God of gods in Sion.'[10]

[1] Eccli. xxxii. 15. [2] 1 Thess. v. 6. [3] Osee vi 4. [4] Jerm. xvii. 6.
[5] Job iii. 5. [6] Ps. xciv. 8. [7] Isai. xxvi. 21. [8] Luke xii. 37.
[9] Ibid. [10] Ps. lxxxiii. 6, 8.

Article IV.

Of the means of combating sloth in rising.

The observance of the following rules will enable us to persevere constantly in our resolution of rising promptly at the appointed hour. They refer to the precautions to be taken on the eve; the conduct to be observed at the hour of rising, and the manner of repairing our fault when we have been vanquished by sloth.

1. *Precautions to be taken on the eve.*

The first means to be employed against sloth is proposed to us by St. Ignatius; it is to determine in the evening, before retiring to rest, the hour at which we propose to rise the following morning; but our resolution must be firm, efficacious, and in some degree sacred, so that we should regard the breach of it as a real fault; it must be accompanied by an examen of the various pretexts and difficulties which self-love will be likely to invent when the time for rising arrives, for it is then that our sensuality rebels against our good resolutions of the preceding evening in order to nullify them. In the evening, therefore, before going to bed, let us arm ourselves against our own weakness by a firm and generous protestation, saying, for instance: 'My God, I resolve to rise to-morrow at such an hour without a moment's delay. I will not yield to any of the suggestions of sloth, but will rise in spite of the perspiration, the drowsiness, the headache, and the other trifling ailments that I may experience.' The better to insure the fulfilment of this promise, we may occasionally bind ourselves by a temporary vow, obligatory under pain of venial sin, and not extending beyond a term of two, three,

or at most eight days, not to remain in bed beyond the determined time. We cannot imagine what countless graces fidelity to such a resolution obtains for us, nor how powerfully it impels the love of God to assist us in conquering sloth. It is also very advantageous to place our good resolutions under the protection of the saints, to invoke them as witnesses of the engagements we take, and to protest that we consent to their becoming our accusers on the last day, should we fail in the observance of them. We may likewise select some saint or patron, promising him in his honour and with his aid to endeavour to conquer our sloth in rising. Having taken these wise precautions we may tranquilly retire to rest, and we shall soon learn their efficacy by experience.

2. *How we must act at the time of rising.*

The Holy Ghost Himself has taught us the second means of conquering our sloth. 'At the time of rising be not slack.'[1] If we listen to ourselves, if we enter into a compromise with self-love, and stop to weigh the reasons which sensuality and sloth allege, we are already vanquished. Laziness will speedily triumph over us, enslave us, and lull us into an enervating and shameful repose. Let us then generously shut our hearts against the seduction of the senses if we would guard our virtue against the allurements of an effeminate indolence.

The moment we know the hour for rising has come, or that we hear the sound of the clock or bell, or the voice of the person charged to awaken us, we must obey with alacrity and without a moment's delay. We must

[1] Eccli. xxxii. 15.

spring out of bed as expeditiously as if a venomous reptile had glided into it, or as if a dreadful conflagration had broken out in the house; for we may be convinced that the pleasure we experience in sleeping longer insinuates itself stealthily and sweetly into the heart, 'but in the end it will bite like a snake.'[1] The seductive and perfidious heat of the bed is a spark capable, if not of enkindling the fire of concupiscence, at least of maintaining and fanning its flames. Let us beware, then, lest this pleasure 'be transformed into a' homicidal 'serpent,'[2] and this spark consume our robe of innocence. Let us rise promptly: the least delay is fraught with danger.

As an incentive to the cheerful and diligent performance of this first act of the day, we may, immediately on awaking, represent to ourselves our Angel Guardian saying to us: 'Arise quickly;'[3] and adding: 'Thou shalt die' to-day, 'and not live'[4] any longer; 'thou shalt give an account of thy stewardship.'[5] It is quite certain the charitable angel appointed to guard us in all our ways will not fail to incite and solicit us to quit our listlessness; for what are the remorse of conscience, the interior lights and the inspirations to rise promptly which we experience, if not the tender and salutary admonitions of this heaven-appointed Guide? The respect due to him, combined with the remembrance of an approaching death and judgment which may indubitably befall us this very day, is a powerful stimulus to conquer sloth. How many, in fact, have risen in the morning full of health and vigour and with a long life apparently before them, and yet, ere that same evening, have been summoned before their Judge?

[1] Prov. xxiii. 32. [2] Exod. vii. 9. [3] Acts xii. 7.
[4] 4 Kings xx. 1. [5] Luke xvi. 2.

Can we pretend to be exempt from a sudden death which has surprised so many others? Besides, should God preserve us in life would we not regret having neglected to consecrate to Him the first-fruits of the day? While, should our last hour toll, how bitterly would we not bewail having sacrificed the first moments of the day to self-love and sloth and thus sullied them by venial sin.

With what confusion shall we not hear the interrogation of the Divine Judge: 'Where wert thou when the morning stars praised me together, and all the sons of God made a joyful melody?'[1] We shall be compelled to answer: 'I was lazily lolling in bed with my eyes weighed down with sleep.' Let us then do now what must one day be to us a source of joy and consolation, instead of preparing for ourselves, by our negligence, a too tardy repentance.

3. *How we should repair our fault when we have been vanquished by sloth.*

The third means of correcting sloth is to inflict on ourselves some voluntary penance when we have yielded to its solicitations. This prompt and just retribution merits for us the grace of being more faithful to our promises, while it also accustoms us to a stricter vigilance in the observance of our resolutions. It is, moreover, a meet expiation for the offence offered to the Almighty.

In the imposition of those penances we should, by uniting discretion to fervour, choose such as are most compatible with our wants and the end we have in view. 'At the time of rising are we not slack?'[2] Do we not 'resemble the slothful man who turns in his bed as a door turneth on its hinges,'[3] being unable to leave it?

[1] Job xxxviii, 4-7. [2] Eccli. xxxii. 15. [3] Prov. xxvi. 14.

Are we not endowed with the fatal talent of inventing 'excuses for our sins'[1] and making out pretexts to authorise our sloth? Are we resolved to employ henceforth the means of grace just taught us? How will we observe this resolution? It is an important affair which demands both courage and constancy. Let us then be generous; for if we completely succumb to sloth, God may send us a disease which will confine us to bed longer than we would wish.

'How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? If thou arise not out of thy sleep' spiritual 'want shall come upon thee, and poverty, as a man armed,' shall seize thy soul. On the other hand, if thou are diligent in rising thou 'shalt reap a rich harvest of virtue, and thy soul shall not experience indigence'[2] in spiritual gifts. If thou givest thy heart early to the Lord that made thee, and wilt pray in the sight of the Most High, He will fill thee with the spirit of understanding and He will direct thy counsels,'[3] 'for they that in the morning early watch for me, shall find me,'[4] says the Lord. 'Arise, therefore, thou that sleepest,' that Christ 'may enlighten thee'[5] during the hour of meditation, 'for we ought to prevent the sun' 'to bless the Lord,' and adore God in His House 'at the dawning of the light.'[6]

CONCLUSION, IN WHICH IS SHOWN THE RELATION WHICH THIS FIRST PART BEARS TO THE PURGATIVE LIFE.

We announced in the commencement of this work that the first part of it refers to the purgative way. We shall now explain how, in reality, it perfectly corresponds to this first state of the spiritual life. Self-knowledge, the

[1] Ps. cxl. 4. [2] Prov. vi. 9. [3] Eccli. xxxix. 6 and fol.
[4] Prov. viii. 17. [5] Ephes. v. 14. [6] Wisd. xvi. 28.

detestation of sin, and the repression of concupiscence is the end we propose to ourselves in the purgative way, for we cannot apply a suitable remedy to a wound of which we are ignorant; consequently it is necessary to know ourselves in order to understand our disease. We do not take much pains to cure a malady which we cherish. Finally, we shall never be perfectly restored to health, unless we remove the causes of the disease, which are, as regards the soul, the revolts of concupiscence. It is, therefore, indispensably necessary to eradicate our propensity to evil even from its roots. We have elucidated, in the fourth chapter of this First Part, the method of acquiring self-knowledge, the source of our defects and predominant passion. In the first, second, and third chapters we have considered the motives for detesting even venial sin, and of destroying its principal causes, which are tepidity and the abuse of grace. Lastly, in the fifth and sixth chapters we have adduced powerful motives for combating our evil tendencies, and particularly the fear of human respect and sloth in rising. These subjects treated of in the first part of this work evidently relate to the purgative way, since we lead the reader gradually to the end to which this way must tend, namely, self-knowledge, abhorrence of sin, and the repression of concupiscence.

A faithful observance of these instructions will not merely enable us to conquer the vices against which they are directed, but will facilitate our progress in solid virtue and in the practice of the means for its attainment, which shall be indicated in the Second Part, which corresponds to the illuminative way.

PART II.

OF THE PRINCIPAL MEANS OF ATTAINING SOLID VIRTUE.

THE chief obstacles to solid virtue being once removed, we must adopt the most efficient means of cultivating and consolidating it in our souls. Of these I shall mention six, which are: the perfection of our ordinary actions, mental prayer or daily meditation, interior recollection, frequent communion, the particular examen, and spiritual retreats. These holy practices are 'the wings' of the soul, by whose aid it rapidly ascends to the pinnacle of perfection.

The faithful accomplishment of our ordinary actions imparts perfection to our whole life. Meditation is the spiritual oil which feeds the flame of piety; recollection is the trusty guardian of fervour and good resolutions; and finally, the Blessed Eucharist is the fruitful source whence we may copiously draw the divine grace, which alone is capable of preserving in us the virtues we acquire by means of the particular examen and retreat. By these holy practices we can attain to the perfection of virtue; and as all this Second Part tends to excite us to observe them, it follows that it corresponds to the illuminative way.

CHAPTER I.

OF THE PERFECTION OF OUR ORDINARY ACTIONS.

It is a truth unanimously taught by the Fathers of the Church that our sanctity depends on the perfection of our actions, and that the fidelity with which we perform our most ordinary duties is the best criterion by which we may judge of our spiritual state.

The Gospel itself makes all the sanctity of Jesus Christ consist in this point: 'He hath done all things well.'[1] There are two powerful incentives to our performing our actions well, the advantages we lose and the injury we sustain by doing them imperfectly. This twofold consideration shall form the subject of the two first articles. In the third we shall explain in what manner we should perform our ordinary actions.

Article I.

Of the advantages of which the imperfection of our ordinary actions deprives us.

1. *The loss of numberless degrees of grace and glory.*

Man's life is but a succession of daily-recurring actions, which are, however, so many acts of virtue performed with the requisite perfection. So that if our actions are accompanied with holy dispositions, our whole life shall be a series of virtuous actions succeeding each other uninterruptedly, as so many precious links of a golden chain.

[1] Mark vii. 37.

The Catholic faith teaches that a new degree of sanctifying grace corresponds to every virtuous action of the just man, and that every degree of sanctifying grace entitles him to a new degree of eternal glory. Hence it follows that our daily actions, when performed in the proper spirit, form an admirable and happy concatenation of innumerable acts of virtue and degrees of grace in this life and of glory in the other.

We each day perform at least twenty different actions. How many more in a week! and what a still greater number in a month! Now, should these actions be performed perfectly, they obtain for us in the space of a month several hundred degrees of grace for this life and a corresponding number of degrees of glory for eternity. On the contrary, we forfeit all these blessings should our actions be vitiated by negligence, tepidity, and sin.

Now, so inestimable is the value of one degree of grace, one degree of glory, that were the saints capable of regret they would bewail eternally the loss of those which, through their own fault, they have failed to merit, whilst to obtain even one of them the damned would willingly endure a thousand hells.

But we, blind that we are, reckon as nought the incalculable and irreparable loss of so many degrees of grace and glory. Oh, how different shall be our sentiments when standing before the dread tribunal of our Judge!

Soul destined for heaven, enter, I implore you, into your heart's depths, and there ponder the price of those blessings, the winning or losing of which depends on yourself. If you perform well the meditation, the lecture, or the action, whatever it may be, in which you are now engaged, you shall behold the incomparable beauty of God more vividly for all eternity, you shall love Him

everlastingly with a purer and more ardent love, and enjoy Him for ever with a more perfect felicity; for it is a truth of faith[1] that every act of virtue in the just man merits an additional degree of glory in heaven.

But if you perform this same action carelessly, you shall lose an entire eternity of greater felicity. You shall possess a degree less of knowledge and love of the immortal beauty of God; consequently, you shall forfeit as many eternities of more intimate knowledge and love of the Divinity and of more perfect happiness as you shall perform your actions negligently.

What are your thoughts concerning these truths? What! for nothing, or rather through a disgraceful indolence so easily vanquished, to consent to know less perfectly the enchanting beauty of the Creator; to love less ardently, through endless ages, a God infinitely good in Himself, and infinitely liberal towards you, and thus deprive yourself of an augmentation of everlasting happiness! Should these reflections fail to awaken your regret for the losses you have sustained, you are unworthy your heavenly destiny.

My God, what have I done in performing any of my actions negligently! Like a prodigal, I have sacrificed an entire eternity of greater happiness; I have voluntarily and irrevocably forfeited the opportunity of beholding you more clearly and loving you more ardently. Were the loss of a limb to be the penalty of the ill performance of an action, I should be inconsolable; and yet every time I neglect one of my duties, I bereave myself of an increase of grace, I lessen the lustre of the crown of glory that awaits me, and diminish the beauty of the throne reserved for me; but, fool that I am, I am stoically indif-

[1] Conc. Trent. Sess. vi. can. 31.

ferent to this awful loss. Ye angels, be astonished, for this conduct is that of a Christian, of a religious, of a priest who knows, who acknowledges that the loss of a degree of grace and glory is incomparably more deplorable than the deprivation of all the senses, and of life itself. Yes, it is the sublimity of my vocation that enhances my culpability; 'for I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord!' That seculars engrossed with family cares should be apathetic about such a loss is, doubtless, very censurable, still we tolerate, and, in some manner, excuse it in them on account of their condition. But that I, a religious, whose whole life should be but a continual increase of grace; I, a priest, who believe and teach others that the joys of paradise are infinite and eternal, that I should be as indifferent as an infidel as to whether I behold more distinctly and love more ardently you who are my last end, that I am unconcerned as to whether I occupy the first or the last place in heaven, provided I be admitted there, is an outrage to God, and deserves a long and severe retribution in the other life. My God, Thou who hast granted me light to discern the unworthiness of such conduct, grant me Thy divine assistance, that I may return from my wanderings.

2. *The loss of countless other blessings with which the goodness of God is wont to recompense fidelity in performing our ordinary actions perfectly.*

Every action of the just man, performed with the requisite perfection, honours the Divine Majesty, rejoices the Church triumphant, enriches the Church militant with new merits, and solaces the Church

suffering. Let us make a *résumé* of these advantages. Each of our actions, but especially the Holy Sacrifice and the recitation of the Office, may, if piously performed, obtain the conversion of a sinner, prevent the fall of a just man, procure the deliverance of a soul from purgatory. What graces will it not likewise gain for ourselves! Did we not mar the value of our actions in the sight of God by our carelessness and other defects, we might frequently preserve the religious orders of which we are members from the evils which threaten them; arrest the progress of heresies; avert public calamities, the horrors of conflagrations, the ravages of pestilence, and countless other evils. It is a truth of faith that by our good works we may ward off chastisements from the earth, and obtain all requisite spiritual and temporal blessings for our fellow-creatures. This dogma is an evident consequence of the belief in the communion of saints professed in the Creed, and is likewise confirmed by the practice of the Church, which applies the prayers and merits of the elect to all the wants of the faithful.

A soul attentive to perform all its actions well is a 'burning lamp'[1] in the house of God, and whose flame, constantly fed by the oil of charity, serves to enlighten the neighbour. It is by its good works 'an example of true light,'[2] the 'golden altar'[3] whence the incense of prayer perpetually ascends before the throne of God, since 'every time we perform works pleasing to Him'[4] we accomplish the precept of Jesus Christ, 'to pray always.'[5] In effect, it has found out the best method of honouring God during the whole day, by performing

[1] Dan. x. 6. [2] St. Greg. Hom. [3] 3 Kings vii. 48.
[4] St. Hilary. [5] Luke xviii. 1.

all its actions perfectly.'[1] But what an honour for a soul to praise the Most High continually, to send up prayers as incense before Him, to be a light to others, to avert from them the divine vengeance, and each moment to enrich itself with new merits! Now all these blessings are lost when negligence mingles with our actions. Then, instead of being a shining lamp, a golden altar, we are but 'chaff and ashes,'[2] 'a barren tree;' like Job, we are covered with ulcers. What, in the sight of God, are actions imperfectly and negligently performed except stains, sterile branches, hideous sores which ruin 'all the interior glory of the King's daughter?'[3] Blind or insensate, therefore, are we when we perform our actions ill; blind, if we fail to recognise the stupendousness of our loss: insensate, if understanding it we neglect to guard against it. O my God, 'who art holy in all Thy works,'[4] grant me grace to perform my ordinary actions with such attention as may render them conducive to Thy glory, to my own salvation, and that of my neighbour!

3. *The loss of the means which conduce to perfection.*

As religious, we are bound, under pain of grievous sin, to aspire to the perfection of our state. Now, according to the unanimous teaching of the masters of the spiritual life, to do our ordinary actions well is at once the promptest, easiest, and most efficacious means of fulfilling this important obligation in its full extent, while it is also the shortest and safest road to high sanctity. In reality, sanctity consists in doing what God wills and in the manner He wills, and this end cannot be more securely attained than by performing

[1] St. Aug. on Ps. [2] Job xxi. 18. [3] Ps. xliv. 14. [4] Ps. cxliv. 13.

our ordinary actions well. This, it is needless to say, can only be effected by a constant vigilance.

For the space of thirty years our Divine Lord manifested His sanctity only by the perfection with which He performed His most habitual and commonplace actions.

'The valiant woman' is praised and declared 'blessed' solely because she fulfilled her duties well. She took up 'the spindle' and the distaff, she worked 'flax and wool,' she distributed 'victuals to her maidens,' she purchased 'a field' and planted 'a vine:'[1] behold all her merit. The consummate sanctity of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, of St. Stanislaus, Blessed Berchmans, and of so many other young saints, was arrived at by no other route than by the performance of common actions in an uncommon manner.

We are, then, our own worst enemies if, through the neglect of this safe and easy road, we expose ourselves to fail in attaining that perfection which our state renders so stringently imperative. How long, O Lord, shall we continue indifferent to eternal riches, while we grieve so bitterly for the loss of a trifle? Is perfection the only good so little worthy our esteem that we may justly place it in the last rank, and renounce the acquisition of it when we could so easily obtain it? 'God of Hosts,'[2] who commandest me 'in all my works to keep the pre-eminence,'[3] 'open Thou my eyes,'[4] that, recognising the value of so many advantages, I may never cease to lament the loss of those which I have forfeited, and that henceforth I may fear nothing so much as that of incurring a similar misfortune.

[1] Prov. xxxi. 10. [2] Ps. lxxxiii. 9. [3] Eccli. xxxiii. 23. [4] Ps. cxviii. 18.

Article II.

On the injury we inflict on ourselves by the imperfection of our ordinary actions.

1. *We prepare for ourselves a more gloomy death.*

Ah! what anguish shall not this thought occasion us at death: I might have lived holily; I might have easily done so by fervour in my daily exercises, united with a sustained and frequently renewed purity of intention, by the faithful employment of the means which were prescribed for me. It was not different works, but a different manner of doing them, that was demanded of me; but, oh! accursed negligence, whose only fruit has been to deepen my guilt, to increase my remorse and punishment, by so many Masses, meditations, and examens, by the recitation of the holy Office, by those very actions, in fine, which, had I done myself violence, would have exalted me to the sublime throne of glory occupied by that elect soul who lived with me!

Others, my friends and companions, have practised perfection; I proposed to imitate them, I even made the attempt. Why did I relax?—with a little perseverance I should have won the victory.

But, yielding to a culpable inconstancy, I abandoned the good I had begun, I neglected to tend to that degree of perfection to which God called me. Ah, I remember the labours, the sufferings, the weariness, with which my ordinary actions were fraught through life! What weariness on the school-forms!—what fatigue in travelling!—what painful vigils spent in study!—what difficulties I had to contend with in the accomplishment of

my different duties! Had I borne these trials with purity of intention; had I performed all my works with the requisite perfection, I would have merited a high degree of glory for heaven.

Oh, inexplicable madness! labouring, studying, exhausting myself night and day, 'I have laboured in vain,'[1] fatiguing myself unmeritoriously for trifles, I have wasted my strength, destroyed my health, shortened my life, and instead of earning a recompense, I have only accumulated debts for which I shall have to satisfy the Divine Justice. What do I say? By a just judgment of God, instead of the esteem and advantages which I have imagined would accrue to me in a worldly point of view, I have only reaped confusion and an affliction more grievous than all my sufferings!

Such, at death, shall be the sentiments of a man who, during life, shall have performed his ordinary actions negligently and precipitately. Beware, lest you also be condemned to repeat this sad lamentation of Job: 'I have had empty months and have numbered to myself wearisome nights,'[2] void of merit and full of defects which must be expiated, 'my days are vanished like smoke,'[3] 'they have been wasted in vanity,'[4] and now too late I have shed tears of anguish. I have done but little good, and that little I have done imperfectly. My whole life presents but one long sad chain of defects with which the demons have encompassed me in order to present me to the Divine Judge. 'My days are consumed without any hope,'[5] 'my thoughts are unprofitable thoughts, my works are fruitless works,'[6] 'my soul is void,'[7] 'I have found nothing in my hands,'[8] 'I have

[1] Isai. xlix. 4. [2] Job vii. 3. [3] Ps. ci. 4. [4] Ibid. lxxvii. 33.
[5] Job vii. 6. [6] Isai. lix. 4. [7] Ibid. xxix. 8. [8] Ps. lxxv. 6.

spent my strength without fruit,'[1] and yet, 'that night when no man can work,'[2] already enshrouds me, that awful night 'when time shall be no longer,'[3] to amass solid goods or to repair the losses I have sustained. 'Oh! who will grant me that I might be according to the years past, according to the days in which God kept me?'[4] But since grace once lost can never return, at least, 'O Keeper of men,'[5] 'I will recount to thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul.'[6] For so much lost time I will offer thee 'a humble and contrite heart,' in the hope that 'Thou wilt not despise it, O my God!'[7] I will be sedulously on my guard lest tepidity, vanity, or sensual pleasures, as so many 'voracious insects,' 'consume what remains'[8] to me of life.

2. *A more severe judgment.*

After death, our works alone shall accompany us 'before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the proper things of the body, according as he hath done whether it be good or evil.'[9] There it will not be asked if we were an illustrious personage on the theatre of the world, but if we performed our actions well; it will not be inquired whether we filled distinguished posts, but how we have filled them; it is not the ease, but the sanctity with which we acquitted ourselves of our duties that will be investigated. In the accusatory delineation which Satan will make of our lives not one of our daily actions shall be omitted.

There we shall behold numberless meditations, examens, spiritual lectures, neglected, curtailed, or rendered worthless by our precipitation and carelessness, countless

[1] Isai. xlix. 4.
[2] John ix. 4.
[3] Apoc. x. 6.
[4] Job xxix. 2.
[5] Job vii. 20.
[6] Isai. xxxviii. 15.
[7] Ps. l. 19.
[8] Joel i. 4.
[9] 2 Cor. v. 10.

confessions, communions, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, performed through routine, with tepidity and without fruit; so many meals, recreations, studies, avocations of every description, which had their origin not in purity of intention, but in the natural vivacity of our disposition, vainglory, or some equally vicious motive.

In a word, our daily actions shall form the principal matter of this examen on which our judgment shall depend; and as they occupy the greater portion of our life, their value shall determine the measure of the rewards or chastisements which await us; for 'the Son of man,' from whom nothing is hidden, 'will render to every one according to his works.'[1] He will not judge according to reputation, offices, birth, but He will render to each one 'according to his works;' *to each one,* that is to the king as to the subject, to the great as to the lowly, to the religious as to the secular, and consequently to myself, 'for there is no respect of persons with God.'[2] My soul! what shall then be thy sentiments when, discerning the malice of thy actions, the just Judge says to thee: 'Had I bid thee do some great thing, surely thou shouldst have done it.'[3] Had I commanded thee to tend to perfection by the practice of rigorous austerities, perpetual prayer, the preaching of the Gospel, thou shouldst have unhesitatingly obeyed me; with how far greater reason then shouldst thou have done so when the faithful discharge of thy daily duties was all that I asked of thee? What less could I demand of thee?

I called thee to great sanctity, will the Lord say, addressing our soul; I furnished thee with easy means of attaining to it: 'it was not above thee nor far off from thee; it was not in heaven nor beyond the sea, but

[1] Matt. xvi. 27. [2] Rom. ii. 11. [3] 4 Kings v. 13.

it was very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart;'[1] it consisted simply in not doing imperfectly the good to which thou wert obliged. 'Thou art' then, 'inexcusable, O man,'[2] because, neglecting so easy a means of acquiring perfection, thou hast multiplied thy faults and punishments in the fulfilment of those very duties which might have augmented thy merits and rewards, and that at so little cost to thee; thou art inexcusable because thou hast applied more assiduously to profane reading than to spiritual lecture, to play than to prayer, to study than to assisting at the Holy Sacrifice, and because thou hast taken less pains to serve me and merit heaven than others have done to please the world through the hope of some perishable gain. 'Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thy iniquities,'[3] when thou didst compel my omnipotence to concur in thy acts and my sanctity to behold the hideous spectacle of thy imperfections. Alas! what excuses shall we allege to appease the wrath of our Judge?

'O God, the searcher of hearts and reins,'[4] what reply shall I make? 'I cannot answer one for a thousand accusations; and if I would justify myself,'[5] my own works shall condemn me. There should not have been a single act of my whole life which did not lovingly tend to Thee, and yet scarcely is there one amongst them unsullied by numberless defects. Every day, and almost every moment, I have compelled Thee to concur in my sins by the incessant abuse of my senses and the faculties of my soul for which I am indebted solely to Thy bounty.

How guilty have I not been in offending Thee, my

[1] Deut. xxx. 12, and fol. [2] Rom. ii. 1. [3] Isai. xliii. 24.
[4] Ps. vii. 10. [5] Job ix. 3 and 20.

God, I who belong to Thee by so many titles, who am Thy servant and the son of Thy handmaid, who am bound by so many obligations to serve Thee perfectly? But I repent of my ingratitude, 'pardon me my iniquities,' my God, 'before the great accounting day.'[1] Grant me grace now to accomplish all my duties with that religious attention which I shall one day so ardently desire to have brought to them, and the absence of which would then cost me such deep and unavailing regret.

3. *A longer and more rigorous punishment.*

What shall be our horror at judgment to find that by so many labours we have merited torments instead of recompenses, and that our actions which inflated us with vanity and caused us to prefer ourselves to others, are, owing to the imperfection with which they were performed, but straw destined for an expiatory fire in the sight of God.

Labour and sorrow are as the two pivots on which our life has continually turned. How wretched, then, we are, while labouring, running, and fatiguing ourselves all day, to have only collected wood and straw to intensify the avenging flames of purgatory! How we are to be pitied, after so much misery and suffering, to have this place of torments and atonement as our heritage; but especially to have merited it by neglecting to perform our ordinary actions perfectly!

Alas! how often do religious themselves perform imperfect, consequently unmeritorious and almost wholly dead works, because inattention, indevotion, want of purity of intention, or some equally vitiating principle has accompanied them. Hapless that we are! What

[1] Prose of the Dead.

shall be our dismay when, entering the prison of purgatory, abandoned by all, we shall find ourselves encompassed by darkness, flames, and torments, without any alleviation or intermission of our sufferings; when we learn that we are expiating those very actions which we might so easily have sanctified; which, instead of having subjected us to the pains of purgatory, might have augmented our glory in heaven? Let us ask ourselves how should we then wish to have acted.

But those desires and wishes shall then be unavailing. If we are wise let us take precautions now that 'an acceptable time' is given us, and that the day of salvation'[1] still shines upon us. Oh! could a soul in purgatory return to this world, with what assiduity would it not accomplish its daily actions! We are guilty of an unpardonable cruelty towards ourselves, if we do not act as this soul would do, and we shall one day bitterly bemoan the omission.

'Lord, all of whose works are perfect,'[2] grant me grace to do nothing in future but what is good, and to do that good with purity of intention. Ah! how many ties bind me to Thee! By Thee alone I live, from Thee I have received all that I possess, on Thee I absolutely depend; I detest, therefore, every action which shall be performed through any other motive than Thy love; may my tongue become mute, my hand wither, my mind become a blank, rather than that I should in future say, do, or think anything of which Thou art not the principle and the end. 'Place Thyself as a seal upon my heart that I may act through pure motives; and place Thyself 'as a seal upon my arm,'[3] that I may serve Thee fervently by the perfection of my ordinary actions.

[1] 2 Cor. vi. 2. [2] Eccli. xxxix. 21. [3] Cant. viii. 6.

Article III.

1. *On the means of performing our actions perfectly.*

Two conditions are necessary for the perfection of our actions: that they be good in themselves and performed well.

To find acceptance with God, they must not merely be performed in a state of grace, but also in the order of obedience, that is, we must have received a command, or at least the permission to do them. It does not suffice, therefore, that our actions be intrinsically good, neither is it sufficient that purity of intention sanctify and render meritorious such as are indifferent; it is likewise necessary that obedience be the mainspring of them. To confess, visit the sick, study, read pious books, are undoubtedly excellent things; nevertheless, if neither commanded nor permitted us they are reprehensible, and instead of recompense they merit chastisement. Hence, our actions, to be raised to a supernatural order, must be regulated by obedience; for of all that is done in opposition to the order, or without the approbation of superiors, being the fruit of self-will or singularity, must be perverted from good to evil. No, it does not suffice that we perform good works, we must perform them well. It is not so much the nature as the modifying circumstances of our actions that shall be scrutinised before the divine tribunal. 'Glory,' says Seneca, 'consists less in our deeds than in doing them well.' This philosopher was right, since, according to the beautiful remark of St. Cyprian, no work 'is holy unless it be performed holily.' God commands us in Holy Writ 'to accomplish justly that which is just,'[1] 'and in all our works to

[1] Deut. xvi. 20.

keep the pre-eminence.'[1] This perfection requires four conditions: purity of intention, fervour, perseverance, and fidelity in performing them at the time prescribed.

Purity of intention consists in always and under all circumstances proposing to ourselves the greater glory of God, as the pure and sole end of all that we do. This virtue is to our whole life what the eye is to the body. In the same manner as 'the eye,' according to the words of our Divine Master, 'is the light of the body,' so also purity of intention is the light of our works. 'If our eye be single, our whole body shall be lightsome; but if our eye be evil, our whole body shall be darksome;'[2] consequently our actions derive all their light and value from the purity of intention with which they are performed.

Let us now interrogate our heart. Have we not unjustly sought our own glory with that of God? Have we not in the innermost recesses of our soul, in our most intimate will and secret motives, proposed to ourselves some personal advantage, gratification, or satisfaction? Let us beware lest self-love, insinuating itself into our actions under the guise of piety, deteriorate their merit, if not in their commencement, at least during their continuance or at their close. To avert this calamity, we must always take great care to form a good and pure intention at the commencement of each action and to renew it from time to time during its continuance, particularly if the act is to be of considerable duration. In default of this precaution our intention, becoming weakened of itself, will cease to animate the succeeding works, whose value and title to reward will thus be materially diminished.

[1] Eccli. xxxiii. 23. [2] Matt. vi. 22.

2. Fervour dispels and dissipates our natural listlessness in the discharge of our duties. Our soul, just as the weights of a clock, always gravitates towards the earth, to which its propensities attract it. If we make an effort for a moment this ardour soon relaxes, like the activity of the flame that has consumed its aliment: it therefore stands in constant need of having its courage sustained and stimulated by an undivided attention and constant application to the proper performance of the duty in which it is actually engaged.

However, we must not confound true fervour with a certain impetuosity, an inconsiderate and insatiable activity 'which causes us,' says Hugh of St. Victor, 'to precipitate the present action and desire to have already begun another of which there is no question at present; so that we act badly as regards both the present and the future.' He alone acts well who is fervent without precipitation, hastens with moderation, and executes everything with such admirable tranquillity that one would not imagine he had any other business to attend to. The fervent soul, by the faithful discharge of its daily duties, will speedily attain a degree of virtue to which the cowardly and slothful will not arrive in many years. 'An ounce of gold is of more value than a mass of lead,' says St. Gregory Nazianzen; so it is with an exercise performed with fervour: it is infinitely more meritorious than many others fulfilled with tepidity and sloth.

3. Perseverance, which is the third condition required for the perfection of our daily actions, consists in preserving to the end the purity of intention and fervour with which they have been begun, and, above all, not to leave them unfinished and incomplete. We sometimes commence meditation, Mass, spiritual lecture, and

the divine Office with true fervour, but afterwards the oppressive and stifling wind of tepidity arises, and our actions, undertaken with the zeal of perfection, gradually relax, drag painfully on, and terminate in apathy. It also frequently happens that, disgusted with our duty and the continuity of our labours, we leave a work imperfect and little more than half begun, which we had undertaken generously and courageously. Like the Sulamitess, 'we go up into the palm-tree,' but our efforts are not sufficiently sustained 'to take hold of the fruits thereof,'[1] our courage evaporates too soon, and we lose the fruit of our first labours. Let us, then, frequently recall this maxim, 'Corrupt not unto the end'[2] what has been begun well, since it is to perseverance the crown is promised.

4. Finally, our works should likewise be performed at the time prescribed. 'He,' says St. Ambrose, 'who does good and accomplishes the work of God must be most careful in the distribution of his time.' Let us then punctually follow our rule of life as regards the manner and time to be observed in the distribution of our daily actions.

This advice is of the utmost importance, and we can form no conception of the happy results which docility to it will produce on the perfection of our actions; for all that is done according to order is regular and perfect, and a constant obedience to our rule is a voluntary and continual holocaust of our own will: now, such an exactitude and such a sacrifice are as profitable to us as they are pleasing to God. By the faithful observance of these four conditions the value of our actions, according to the words of the apostle, shall be comparable to that

[1] Cant. vii. 8. [2] Title, Ps. 74.

'of gold, silver, and precious stones,'[1] they shall deserve to be offered by angels 'to Him that sitteth on the throne.'[2] But if we neglect them our works shall be but wood, hay, and stubble,' destined for an avenging fire; for, adds the same apostle, 'every man's work shall be tried by fire: if any man's work,' tried like gold, 'abide, he shall receive a reward, and if it burn' as worthless straw, 'he shall suffer the loss'[3] of it; that work shall vanish like smoke.

'Let us,' therefore, 'fear all our works, knowing that the divine justice will not allow one fault to pass unpunished.'[4] Let us enter into the depths of our soul to see with what purity of intention, what fervour, what perseverance, and what order we have been wont to perform our actions. Do we not merit the same reproach from the Almighty as that addressed by Him to the Bishop of Sardes? 'I find not thy works full,'[5] because vainglory, vanity, human respect, sensuality, immortification of the senses, detain thee in their nets and cling to thy works to rob them of their merit and leave only the spurious proceeds of thy own capital.

Wretched souls! what shall be our consternation when, at the approach of death, we are compelled to cry out: 'My days have fled away, and have not seen good,'[6] 'I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength.'[7] I have laboured during all the night of this life, and have taken nothing; soon my sentence shall be pronounced, and 'I am able to show no mark of virtue: but am consumed in my wickedness.'[8] At that awful moment how shall we desire to have performed our ordinary actions?

[1] 1 Cor. iii. 12. [2] Apoc. v. 13. [3] 1 Cor. iii. 13 and fol. [4] Job ix. 28.
[5] Apoc. iii. 2. [6] Job ix. 25. [7] Isai. xlix. 4. [8] Wisd. v. 13.

Let us, then, take precautions while we have time, 'before it be dark, and before our feet stumble upon the dark mountain,'[1] that is, before we reach the term of life when the infirmities and chill of old age render us powerless for good. Let us hearken to the advice of Solomon: 'Give not your years to so cruel a master as vanity, if you would not groan in the end, when you shall have consumed your strength in vain.'[2]

2. *Means of performing our actions well.*

The first means of performing our ordinary actions well consists in selecting from esteemed authors a good and safe method of acting according to the principles of sanctity. We should afterwards endeavour to conform each of our daily exercises to it, until we have contracted the habit of acquitting ourselves of them piously. Order demands that this spiritual renovation be directed in the first instance to such actions as relate immediately to God, then to those which regard our neighbour, and finally to those which concern ourselves.

These rules of perfection given us by the masters of the spiritual life are a rich mine, whence we may draw a thousand different modes of sanctifying even our most commonplace actions. 'They are the line and measuring reed;'[3] it is by them that our works attain the four sublime dimensions of charity,[4] and are raised to the pinnacle of perfection.

The second is to finish our actions, or at least the most prolonged of them, by a short examen, in order to

[1] Jerem. xiii. 16. [2] Prov. v. 9, 10, 11. [3] Ezech. xl. 3.

[4] 'I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . . that being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length, and height and depth, ... to know all the charity of Christ.'—Ephes. iii. 14 and fol.

discover the faults committed during them, to beg pardon of God, and renew our good resolution, which we should reiterate every time we commence the same occupation.

He who neglects this examen resembles a person who constantly travels the same road, and yet always 'dashes his foot against a stone,'[1] without once remarking the obstacle which impedes our steps. It is thus that, unless we call ourselves to task for the faults committed in our various duties, the same defects will recur every time we repeat the action, and rob our works of their value before God; whereas if we promptly and generously correct the failings discovered by means of this examen, they shall shine 'as the sun in the sight of the Sovereign Master.'[2]

The third means consists in performing each of our actions as if it were to be the last of our life, and as if at its conclusion we were to be cited before the tribunal of the Sovereign Judge to render an account of it.

This is admirably expressed by St. Bernard, who says: 'Before acting, always say to yourself: were you to die immediately afterwards, would you do this? In what manner would you do it?' Thomas à Kempis counsels a like vigilance: 'Thou shouldst comport thyself,' says he, 'in all thy acts and in all thy thoughts, as if thou wert to die to-day.'[3]

These maxims are full of wisdom. In effect, since each of our actions may be the last of our life, it is only rational to perform it with as much care as if our eternity were immediately to follow. St. Augustine admonishes us that all our days should be holy, because we know not which will be the last,' and that possibly no to-morrow may await us; but since also the present action may terminate our life, so likewise we should acquit

[1] Ps. xc. 12. [2] Eccli. xvii. 16. [3] Imit. b. i. ch. 23.

ourselves of it with as much perfection as if we were certain of dying after its completion.

Supposing, however, which is very probable, that the action in which we are now engaged will not end our career, it is not the less true that the faults committed during it shall be faults for all eternity, and that the advantages of grace and glory thus lost by our negligence never shall revive. Such a motive for fulfilling our duties perfectly needs no development; the prudence and advantage of following the conduct we advise is self-evident.

A last means of sanctifying our ordinary actions is to employ a pious stratagem against ourselves, by devoting the whole undivided attention of our mind to the present action as though no other remained to be done, or at least to perform it, with the same care and perfection, as if such were the case. By this artifice we forestall the temptation to distrust, of which the devil makes use to intimidate and deject us, asking us, for instance, whether we shall be able to accomplish all our actions with fidelity and exactitude through the whole course of our life, and whether we shall be capable of sustaining our efforts and mortifying our senses and faculties to the end.

These were the arms adopted by St. Ignatius against similar assaults which he experienced at the beginning of his conversion. Let us have recourse to the same weapons, never allowing ourselves to be occupied, except by the present action; let us discard from our mind all anxiety concerning the future, and about what still remains to be done; we shall thus lighten our labour, avoid weariness; and, gaining courage from the facility of the actual duty, we shall execute all our other obligations with energy and perseverance.

These four means are so many excellent practices,

proper to give value and perfection to all our actions, and to render them supernatural and meritorious. Let us now ask ourselves whether we are resolved to perform our actions in such a way as to be able to say with Jesus Christ, 'I do always the things that please my Heavenly Father.'[1] Happy we, if we thus place our will in the law of God! 'We shall be like a tree planted near the running waters, which shall bring forth its fruit'[2] in due season.

CHAPTER II.

OF FERVOUR IN MEDITATION.

THERE is no more efficacious remedy against vice, no more excellent means of acquiring virtue, no more invincible weapon for conquering the efforts of hell, than prayer. St. Nilus, writing to Anastasia, says that the devil directs all his temptations, lays all his snares, in order to prevent meditation or to render the practice of it difficult, or even to induce us to relinquish the habit of and acquire a disrelish for it. He knows that, if he obtains this result, he will have carried away the corner-stone of our spiritual edifice. To avert so dire a misfortune let us reflect on the injury or profit that redounds to us from prayer, according as we make it with negligence or fervour. Having thus convinced ourselves of the necessity of acquitting ourselves well of this exercise, we will, in the first place, endeavour to discover the obstacles which would hinder us from profiting by it, and afterwards the means of performing it with fruit.

[1] John viii. 29. [2] Ps. i. 3.

Article I.

Of the injury that redounds to us from negligence in Meditation.

1. *It prevents our advancement in virtue.*

We really advance in virtue only in proportion as we are advanced in prayer, and whoever performs this exercise with only a mediocre fervour has every reason to apprehend that he has made but little progress in perfection. This is not an individual opinion; it is the doctrine of the Fathers, and is confirmed by daily experience.

St. John Climacus judged by his morning meditation what would be the success of the remainder of the day. Nor was he wrong; for it is certain that as is our prayer, such usually are our entire days and even our whole life. In effect, at the close of a fervent prayer, we apply ourselves to good with alacrity and joy, we relish the happiness of recollection, and above all, we experience interior peace which imparts life and perfection to our works, and by these sweet impressions elevates our soul to the highest sanctity: but on the contrary, tepidity in meditation induces a most pernicious repugnance to divine things, a languor and benumbing lethargy for good, an outpouring of our soul on exterior objects, and finally, blindness, disquietude, and aridity.

Then temptations multiply, holy resolutions vanish, evil propensities grow stronger, the propensities of voluptuousness, anger, ambition, envy reawaken; disgusted by tepidity, we retrograde, and lose more of our virtue in one day than we had acquired in many months. This it is that made St. John Chrysostom say: 'When I be-

hold a Christian or a religious relax in meditation, and no longer deem it of importance, I augur that he is very weak in virtue, and but scantily adorned with the gifts of God; but when I see him devoted to this holy exercise, I immediately conclude that he is enriched with the most precious graces.' He who does not regard meditation as the first means of acquiring virtue shall make no progress, in vain will he substitute other practices and attempt another route to advance in perfection.

Would we then learn the state of our soul, and at a single glance render ourselves an account of our conscience, let us examine how we make our meditation, and the result will show us to a certainty what we are in the sight of God.

There shall always be a perfect harmony between this salutary exercise and our progress in sanctity; for one lives badly when he is in the habit of praying badly, just as a person has found 'the secret of living well,' says St. Augustine, 'when he has learned to pray well.'

The very nature of prayer is a proof of this truth, for we cannot be perfect except by always doing what God wishes and in the way He wishes. Now, it is in prayer that our mind learns the divine will and that our will inclines to follow it. To abandon meditation, therefore, is obviously to renounce perfection. The flight of evil and the practice of good are, so to say, the two spiritual feet with which we advance in the paths of justice; but how remain firm in this way of aversion for worldly objects, and an unalloyed affection for heavenly things, if we cease to meditate, to study, and to taste in meditation the motives calculated to sustain our courage?

Meditation is 'a burning and unspotted mirror,'[1] in

[1] Wisd. vii. 26.

which the rays of grace are faithfully reflected, in order to diffuse their lustre and warmth into the soul engaged in prayer, 'that it may know to refuse evil and to choose the good;'[1] but if we dim, if we break this mirror, our soul shall inevitably fall into frightful darkness and into a deadly torpor.

Alas! I have made no, or at least but very little, progress in virtue, owing to my not having made meditation, or to my having fulfilled this virtue with tepidity. 'My heart is withered,' as grass, 'because I forgot to eat my bread.'[2]

'My spirit hath fainted away,'[3] because 'the manna ceased.'[4] All the virtues I possessed have faded away, because unrefreshed by the salutary dew of morning meditation. Deprived of the sacred flame, from which it derived its life, my heart has become gelid, whilst my rebellious passions, on the contrary, 'burn like fire among thorns,'[5] 'because no water from on high'[6] has extinguished their ardour. My spiritual advancement is at an end, unless the spirit of prayer reanimate my soul. Grant me, then, the grace, O my God, 'that' every day 'my eyes to Thee may prevent the morning, that I may meditate on Thy words'[7] with true fervour.

2. *It prevents our producing fruit in souls.*

Even though a man should be endowed with the happiest natural gifts and the most brilliant qualities, still, should he allow his fervour in meditation to abate, he is 'but sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.'[8]

The most perfect implement is useless for labour

[1] Isaias vii. 26. [2] Ps. ci. 5. [3] Ibid. cxlii. 7. [4] Josue v. 12.
[5] Ps. cxvii. 12. [6] Josue xv. 19. [7] Ps. cxviii. 148. [8] 1 Cor. xiii. 1.

without the hand of the workman, and however good a pen may be, unless guided by a writer, never can it form a letter.

'We are God's coadjutors,'[1] the instruments He has chosen to concur with Him in the salvation of our neighbour. Now, it is in prayer that we place ourselves as a docile instrument in His hands, to act according to His will, under the direction of obedience. In abandoning this exercise, therefore, we incapacitate ourselves for so holy a work.

Though 'the tongue' of the preacher should obey him as 'the pen of a scrivener that writeth swiftly,'[2] still if he do not confide himself to the guidance of the Almighty, by fervent prayer, never shall he inscribe one name in the Book of Life; and should any of his audience be converted, this success should be attributed, not to his sermons, but to the prayers of some more faithful soul.

Let us peruse the lives of the saints and we shall find that no one was ever successful in leading sinners back to virtue without having been devoted to prayer. The reason of the little fruit wrought in souls at present, notwithstanding the number of labourers whom our Lord has sent into His vineyard, is that they meditate but rarely. Formerly one sufficed to convert towns and entire provinces; and in our times several are insufficient to maintain piety in the smallest country.

Once more, the real secret of their ill-success is that they speak much and pray little, and that tepidly; consequently they produce no amendment of morals. They are powerless for good, because they have deliberately deprived themselves of the graces necessary for its accomplishment.

[1] 1 Cor. iii. 9. [2] Ps. xliv. 2.

Preacher of the Gospel! without help from on high, never shalt thou snatch thy brethren from perdition. 'Though Apollo should water, though Paul himself should plant,' if 'God give not the increase'[1] 'thou spendest thyself in foolish labour, the business is above thy strength.'[2] Now, prayer, according to St. Thomas[3] and all theologians, is the condition without which this help shall not be granted you.

Jesus Christ Himself, as we learn from these words of the Royal Prophet, 'Ask of me, and I will give Thee the Gentiles for Thy inheritance,'[4] was obliged to merit the salvation of the human race by the sanctity and fervour of His prayers. What! to move the Eternal Father to pity, it was necessary for His Son to become a suppliant! Ah! what ought not man to do, who is but a servant of God?

To be of use to our fellow-creatures, therefore, our conversation must be frequently in heaven. Hence it is that spiritual authors affirm that to labour fruitfully for the salvation of souls, one has more need to pray than to study, and that to speak effectively of God to men he must himself, in the first instance, commune frequently with God. Unless our soul is an altar, on which incense burns, never will the Lord render 'our voice a strong and mighty voice to break the cedars of Lebanon.'[5] Had not St. Stephen prayed, never would the Church have possessed St. Paul; had not our Lord prayed, the faith of Peter would not have been confirmed.[6] If we

[1] 1 Cor. iii. 6. [2] Exod. xviii. 18.

[3] 'It is necessary to pray in order to obtain from the goodness of God those things which, according to the arrangements of His divine wisdom, He has resolved to grant us.'—2. 2, q. 8, a. 2.

[4] Ps. ii. 8. [5] Ps. lxvii. 36.

[6] 'Simon, Simon, I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.'—Luke xxii. 32.

besiege heaven by the fervour and assiduity of our prayers, possibly we may number instances of a Paul converted and a Peter strengthened in the faith. Oh, what a sad spectacle for your angel guardian, if you who read these words 'destroy,' by your tepidity in prayer, your brother, 'for whom Jesus Christ died;'[1] that is to say, if in punishment of your negligence in prayer Divine Providence withdraw those efficacious graces, which might have converted some one of your auditors, your penitents, your pupils, those confided to your care! Unfortunate man! what reply will you make when an angry God shall one day demand from you an account of these souls, and when they themselves shall invoke upon you all the terrors of His justice?

Oh, Guardian Spirit of my soul! obtain that henceforth 'the fire' of meditation 'shall always burn on the altar' of my heart, and that I may carefully 'feed it' 'by putting' the mysterious 'wood'[2] of holy consideration 'on it every morning.'

3. *It exposes us to the proximate danger of losing the grace of God and our religious vocation.*

A religious who does not love prayer is on the verge of falling into great faults and abandoning his holy vocation. This is a truth which heaven, earth, and hell unanimously testify. Yes, it is attested by the blessed in heaven, by the damned in hell, and by the dying on their bed of suffering; it is, moreover, confirmed by reason, experience, and the most irrefragable authority.

Pope St. Zozimus, in his dogmatical letter to the bishops of Gaul, teaches that 'no one, not even excepting those who have been regenerated by the grace of

[1] Rom. xiv. 15. [2] Levit. vi. 12.

baptism, is capable of avoiding the snares of the devil and vanquishing the temptations of the flesh, without a particular assistance from God, which would enable him to persevere to the end in the practice of a holy life.' The Council of Trent inculcates the same doctrine in the following terms: 'If anyone say . . . . that he who has been justified can, without special help from God, persevere in the justice he has received, let him be anathema.'[1]

It is, therefore, an article of faith that, without special aid from God, the just man can neither persevere in grace nor resist temptations, nor escape the ambushes of Satan.

Prayer is the channel through which this heavenly aid flows to us, and is, according to the ordinary dispensations of Providence, the indispensable condition for its being granted to us; it is the necessary means chosen by the divine wisdom, without which we will not merit the grace to persevere in justice.

Jesus Christ certifies this to us by these words: 'Pray that you enter not into temptation,'[2] as if He said, remark the Fathers, pray, if you would not succumb to temptation. 'We should close our ears,' says St. Augustine, 'to the assertions of the blasphemer, who would have us believe that it would be possible to avoid temptation without recurring to prayer, and all the faithful are bound to anathematise this doctrine. 'In vain,' says Innocent I., 'should we endeavour to gain the victory, unless grace, attracted by the fervour of our prayers, come to our assistance.'[3]

It is true, therefore, that the just man, however exempt he may be from mortal sin, shall never persevere constantly in the friendship of God, unless sus-

[1] Sess. vi. can. 22. [2] Matt. xxvi. 41. [3] Letter to Counc. of Carthage.

tained by help from on high; and that this help is granted to such only as apply to meditation; consequently, the moment we give up this exercise, we expose ourselves to the danger of falling from a state of grace, and even to a second misfortune, which is the consequence of this, the loss of our religious vocation.

The authors whom we have just quoted speak only of prayer in general, and not explicitly of mental prayer or meditation; but the sad and frequent experience of all ages has repeatedly proved that their testimony should likewise extend to the exercise of meditation in particular, especially as regards religious, and I venture to assert still more so, with reference to those of our society.

Alas! how many examples might we not adduce of religious who, having had the misfortune to give up meditation, afterwards fell into great sins, abandoned their holy state, sometimes even apostatised from the faith!

Nor should those desolating results surprise us; for meditation is the source of those lights which manifest to our understanding, in the most vivid and striking colours, the heinousness of sin, the severity of judgment, and the intolerable pains of hell; it awakens and preserves the pious sentiments which induce the will to embrace what is good and shun what is evil; but when the fire of meditation becomes extinct, our understanding necessarily becomes obscured and our will frozen.

'A religious,' says St. Thomas, 'deprived of this spiritual armour is a soldier bereft of strength and shelter.'[1] There is every reason to apprehend that when the night of temptation envelops him in its shades he shall strike his foot against some rock of scandal, when,

[1] His Life.

being already so enfeebled, he will experience a terrible fall. Who can promise but that, disgusted with a regular life and fascinated by a love of freedom, he may yield at length to a violent temptation and despoil himself of the holy habit of religion to return to the world ?

Lancisius is not unsupported by experience, therefore, when he certifies that all religious who fall into any great sin, who abandon their state, who scandalise the Church, have begun by giving up meditation, or at least abridging the time of it, or performing it slothfully, and solely for the sake of appearance. Negligence in this holy exercise is detrimental, not alone to individuals: 'it only needs relaxation in meditation,' says St. Bonaventure, 'to cause a religious order to fall from its primitive fervour, and eventually lose it altogether.'

Let us profit by the misfortune of others and become wise at last. Though we be religious, we may sin grievously and lose our vocation; if we fear sin let us pray; if we dread a shameful apostasy let us also pray; let us daily pray and meditate with great fervour, in order to avoid these two catastrophes which menace us; for if our prayer ascend not to heaven the mercy of God will not descend upon us.

Oh! could we but glance into the abysses of hell and ask of the religious incarcerated therein the cause of their damnation, they would all reply, in their despair, alas! it was our carelessness in making meditation which precipitated us into these flames.

Oh, slothful soul, despite their tardy regrets, you continue insensible, you are not more fervent in prayer! You are admonished that your carelessness is conducting you straight to hell, and still you sleep in it. You

know that it is the source of the most dangerous temptations, and yet you indulge it.

Satan is unremitting in his efforts to make you omit meditation, or at least to curtail it, and yield to distractions; and you take no precautions against his machinations: you obey him as the horse obeys its rider.

Imprudent soul! despise not the friendship of God; squander not, I implore you by the wounds of Jesus Christ, the grace which His precious Blood has merited for you, trample not under foot the vocation which is the pledge of your heavenly predestination. Make not so stupendous a sacrifice to gratify your sensuality and sloth, or for the sake of trifles: for what else are those vain occupations which you prefer to prayer?

Close not your ears to the entreaties of the Holy Ghost, lest God be one day deaf to your cries, and say to you: 'I called you' by meditation to intimate familiarity with me, and 'you refused' to listen to me; 'I stretched out my hand' to assist you: I taught you how to meditate and provided you with suitable books, and time for doing so; I led you into solitude, and 'you did not regard me; you despised all my counsel' and the reproaches I made you concerning your sloth. Now all is changed. 'I will laugh' in my turn, 'in the destruction' which you have brought upon yourself. 'I will mock when that shall come to you which you feared;' when, fallen into mortal sin, you shall be on the point of losing your vocation; when, a traitor to your sacred engagements, 'a sudden calamity shall fall on you, and destruction, as a tempest, shall come upon you. I will laugh and will mock because you have despised' religious 'discipline,'[1] which made meditation a duty of such imperative obligation.

[1] Prov. i. 24 and fol.

'My God, whose wrath no man can resist,'[1] 'Thy terrors have troubled me.'[2] Alas! to what an abyss has not my tepidity in prayer conducted me . . . but I adore the hand that leads me back. 'I will meditate on Thee in the morning.'[3] 'I will think of Thy justifications.'[4] I will make them my daily study. Grant, Lord, that every day 'in my meditation a fire shall flame out,'[5] and 'let my prayer be directed as incense in Thy sight.'[6]

Article II.

On the advantages of fervour in meditation.

1. *It heals all the maladies of our understanding and our will.*

So great is our imperfection that ignorance of spiritual things, erroneous maxims in morality, false ideas of virtue, depraved thoughts and imaginations, are the sad inheritance of our understanding, whilst our will is subject to the passions of envy, impurity, pride, anger, sadness, concupiscence of the flesh, and numberless other temptations: meditation is a universal antidote against all these evils. Its light liberates our understanding from the thraldom of false opinions and the darkness of error; it penetrates it with eternal truths, and fills it with divine knowledge: its unction fortifies our will against the tyranny of the passions and the assaults of the devil; it accustoms it to 'rule' the irregular desires of the heart with a 'rod of iron.'[7]

Meditation protects us against all the enemies of our salvation: it is a city of refuge, where we are sheltered from the attacks of hell; the heavenly antidote which

[1] Job ix. 13. [2] Ps. lxxxvii. 17. [3] Ibid lxii. 7. [4] Ibid. cxviii. 16
[5] Ibid. xxxviii. 4. [6] Ibid. cxl. 2. [7] Ibid. ii. 9.

cures us of the poison of self-love; the beneficent star which enlightens us on the stormy sea of the world, and directs us towards the port; in a word, meditation is the best remedy for the evils which perpetually tend to enslave our understanding and our will.

However, its utility is not confined to these advantages, precious as they are; for souls that have their spiritual interests really at heart fear nothing so much as to stand still in virtue, to be useless for the salvation of their neighbour and exposed to the danger of losing the grace of God and the religious vocation; now mental prayer, like a strong army, triumphs over this triple enemy. It obtains for us those succours from on high, those efficacious graces which cause us to advance in perfection, to labour with fruit for the good of souls, and, lastly, to avoid mortal sin and the loss of our vocation.

Spiritual tepidity is a pernicious disease, a dreadful enemy of the soul; it is the 'worm' concealed under the religious habit itself, which 'consumes'[1] the innocence of an heir of heaven and saps the foundations of piety; it is the demon which frequently causes man to fall into impurity, which afterwards casts him into despair, and renders 'his cure extremely difficult.'[2] Yet even this species of 'satanic possession'[3] yields to the power of prayer.

Let us conclude with these exhortations of the Holy Ghost: 'Is any of you sad' in temptation, 'weariness,' or anxiety, 'let him pray;'[4] does he desire to advance in virtue, 'to make his calling and election sure;'[5] let him pray; but let him pray with respect, with fervour, and with perseverance, and he will assuredly find the remedy

[1] Matt. vi. 19. [2] Matt. xvii. 15. [3] 2 Kings xix. 22.
[4] James v. 13. [5] 2 Pet. i. 10.

for his evils. Jesus Christ has pledged Himself to this. 'Ask,' says He, 'and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you; for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.'[1] What more magnificent promises could be made to prayer, what higher eulogium could be bestowed on its efficacy?

Oh, how rigorous shall be the account which we must one day render for having, through sloth, neglected so easy a means of averting so many evils! How great is our folly! We do not employ efficacious remedies when there is a question of the evils of our soul, while we are so solicitous to relieve the sufferings of our body.

We remain 'on the brink of the probatic well;'[2] we are seated at 'the fountain' of 'wisdom;'[3] we repose beneath the shadow of the 'tree of life,'[4] that is, we enjoy all possible facilities for meditation, and yet we give up this holy exercise; we relinquish it through indifference, unsolicited, or rather when conscience and obedience combine to render it obligatory on us.

2. *It is an exhaustless source of spiritual lights and holy consolations.*

Not only is meditation a preservative against all spiritual evils, but it likewise enriches our soul with the most precious gifts. It floods the mind with light, and seems to communicate to it the splendour of the Sun of Justice. 'The King' of heaven, taking by the hand, so to speak, the Christian that is faithful and fervent in meditation, leads him Himself into His store-rooms,'[5]

[1] Matt. vii. 7. [2] John v. 2. [3] Prov. xviii. 4.
[4] Gen. xviii. 4. [5] Cant. i. 3.

'wherein are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.'[1] There He replenishes his soul 'with all the riches and fulness of understanding unto the knowledge of the mystery of God and the Father of Christ Jesus.'[2] He manifests to him with admirable clearness the incomprehensible beauty of His infinite perfections, the eminent prerogatives of the God-man, the adorable counsels of Divine Providence 'compared with which the loftiest science is but ignorance.'[3]

Thus it was that St. Francis of Assisium, St. Teresa, St. Felix of Cantalice, St. Nicholas Tolentine, and a host of pious persons of all conditions, acquired by prayer alone, unaided by study, more perfect knowledge of the things of God than the most enlightened theologians. 'Ignorant persons rise up,' says St. Augustine, 'and bear away heaven;' they penetrate by meditation to the centre of the holy city, 'and we, with all our learning, remain,' if not 'immersed in flesh and blood,' at least the slaves of a shameful tepidity, which is but too apparent by our carelessness and irreverence in prayer. Such indevotion deserves that 'the darkness of night should encompass us,' while 'the light of the Lord rises'[4] for others; so that we remain destitute of understanding in the school of virtue, though we be in other respects esteemed as erudite teachers and doctors. Unhappy man! 'what avails to thee the brilliancy of thy wit and thy rare facility for penetrating all sciences, if thou followest a wrong route in the study of piety?'[3] 'If thou didst know the whole scripture by heart and the sayings of all the philosophers, what would it profit thee,'[5] if thou didst not know thyself? 'If thou didst

[1] Coloss. ii. 3. [2] Coloss. ii. 2. [3] St. Aug. Conf.
[4] Isaias lx. 2. [5] Imit. b. i. ch. i.

know all things that are in the world, what would it avail thee in the sight of God, who will judge thee according to thy deeds;'[1] and who will ask thee what good thou hast done, and not what learning thou hast acquired? 'A lowly rustic that serveth God,' a poor woman who prays devoutly, 'is better than a proud philosopher who pondereth the course of the stars, and neglecteth his salvation;'[2] since the value of a single ray of supernatural light obtained in prayer infinitely transcends all human wisdom; it is more capable of satisfying and satiating our soul than the greatest proficiency in the most useful and ingenious arts. Is it not folly to devote, to the prejudice of our health, so many days, weeks, months, and years to profane studies, and sacrifice to them even a portion of the few short moments of meditation, and to be unable to employ one hour faithfully in acquiring the science of the saints, which alone can render us happy? Perhaps you will allege that you study in order that you may be a more competent instrument for promoting the glory of God. But, in adducing such an excuse, iniquity can but lie to itself, for, replies the apostle, 'God hath made us fit ministers of the New Testament, not in the letter, but in the spirit, for the letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth.'[3] 'O Fountain of light,'[4] 'may Thy brightness shine at length in the midst of our darkness!'[5]

But how speak of the holy consolations which the faithful soul receives with a kind of exuberance in prayer? 'Though I spoke with the tongue of angels,'[6] never could I express the ineffable charms of these chaste delights. They are 'the hidden manna, which nobody

[1] Imit. b. i. ch. ii. [2] Ibid. [3] 2 Cor. iii. 6.
[4] Josue xviii. 17. [5] Isaias lviii. 10. [6] 1 Cor. xiii. 1.

knows but he that receiveth it.'[1] Often in meditation the soul experiences the truth of the divine promise: 'I will make them joyful in my house of prayer.'[2] So inundated is it with heavenly sweetness that St. Augustine styles mental prayer the paradise of delights, the paradise of spiritual joys, an ocean of peace, into which the heart, inebriated with God, plunges without one sigh of regret for its earthly life, which it would gladly relinquish for ever. Such was the experience of the Anthonys, the Francises of Assisium, the Ignatiuses, the Xaviers, and myriad other saints, who unanimously testify that all the pleasures of the senses, the flesh, and the passions united, are but bitterness compared with one drop of this boundless ocean of delights.

Thy love, O my infinitely good God, 'is better than' the perfidious 'wine,'[3] which the devil presents to us in a deceitful cup. The milk of Thy consolations is sweeter than nectar. Thou appealest for this to our own experience. 'Come,' dost Thou say, 'come,' O mortals! 'taste, and see that the Lord is sweet.'[4] Yes, let us hasten to make the trial, and soon we shall exclaim with the Royal Prophet: 'How great is the multitude of Thy sweetness, Lord, which Thou hast hidden for them that fear Thee.'[5] We shall own with Tertullian that the tears of repentance impart a thousand times more joy than the most seductive pleasures.[6] With St. Augustine, we shall be astonished 'to find that we suddenly experience so much sweetness in severing the dearest ties.' And yet, fools that we are! till now we have deserted the fountains of living waters to run to broken cisterns; we have despised the hidden manna and sighed for the flesh-pots of Egypt.

[1] Apoc. ii. 17. [2] Isaias lvi. 7. [3] Cant. i. 2.
[4] Ps. xxxiii. 9. [5] Ps. xxx. 20. [6] Book on Penance.

Is it not folly to renounce this foretaste of celestial happiness for the sake of gratifying a shameful sloth, which detains us in bed without necessity, and of which we shall be ashamed when we have risen, or to enjoy the pleasures of the table, which compromise our health, or the society of men, which is so often fraught with tedium and disgust?

My God! may that pleasure be changed into bitterness; may those studies, those occupations be accursed, to which I have sacrificed the lights and pure consolations which were reserved for me in meditation.

3. *It perfects the soul by the abundance of virtues and the excellence of the graces which it obtains for it.*

Meditation perfects the soul and enriches it with the most precious spiritual gifts. The soul that prays ill is as 'a garden without water,'[1] but the soul that prays well is 'a garden'[2] always fructified by the celestial dew and adorned with the most exquisite flowers of virtue; it is 'a fruitful olive-tree;'[3] 'a tree planted near running waters,'[4] always laden with heavenly fruit. Nothing causes us to advance with more 'rapid strides in sanctity than a fervent meditation.'[5] By it we are certain of attaining perfection, whilst without its aid never can we do so.

'The man of prayer,' says St. John Chrysostom, 'living in an intimate communication with God, must necessarily become holy.' This the Psalmist has promised: 'we become holy, pure, and innocent'[6] in the company of a man who is 'holy,' pure, and innocent: with how much greater reason must not that soul be

[1] Isaias i. 30. [2] Isaias lviii 11 [3] Ps. li. 10.
[4] Ps. i. 3. [5] St. John Chrys. Hom. [6] Ps. xvii. 26.

spotless which lives in daily familiarity with the Holy of holies?

By meditation 'the mind of man becomes the spouse of the Increated Truth;'[1] 'it is the contract of a holy and spiritual alliance; it consummates the union of two wills in one, identifying them in their likes and dislikes.' 'God,' says St. Bernard, 'establishes those who apply to meditation as faithful ministers in His house, to whom He confides the key of His Heart and of His treasures, whence they may draw copiously at all hours.'

St. John Climacus compares and equals them to the angels: 'their occupation upon earth is similar to that of the angels in heaven.'

What more shall I say? Meditation renders them in some sort omnipotent, since they can effect as much by prayer as God can do by His power. Prayer asks and receives; it seeks and finds, it knocks and the gates of heaven open to it; the man of prayer, like another Jacob, wrestles with God during the dreary night of this life, clinging by the bands of love to this adorable Adversary, nor lets Him go till he has compelled 'the' divine 'Hand to open and fill' his soul 'with blessings.'[2]

'What,' cries out St. Augustine, 'is more beautiful than prayer? What more useful to us? What sweeter to the soul, and more sublime in religion?' And yet, 'be astonished, O ye heavens, and ye gates thereof be very desolate.'[3] Alas! there are even some religious to be found who have nothing less at heart than meditation. Of all their occupations this it is which they esteem the least, and to which they devote least time; there is no business so unimportant, no hope so forlorn, no amusement so futile, which does not afford them a

[1] Wm. of Auvergne. [2] Ps. cxliv. 16. [3] Jerem. ii. 12.

sufficient plea for omitting this holy exercise, or at least abridging it or performing it carelessly.

The learned Suarez would have preferred to forfeit all his knowledge rather than sacrifice one of the seven hours which he each day spent in meditation. Daniel preferred to be cast into the lions' den rather than abstain from his wonted religious exercises, while we omit, without scruple, the whole hour's meditation prescribed by rule, for the sake of study, sleep, sloth, or some equally frivolous reasons, which we would blush were they known.

What shall one day be our confusion when Daniel's fervour shall be contrasted with our tepidity, when at the tribunal of the Sovereign Judge, and in presence of the entire universe the preparation we have brought to meditation shall be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary. Great heavens! Daniel, a courtier, the royal favourite, receives a severe prohibition to invoke his God, and he prefers to renounce his riches, his honours, nay his very life, rather than give up his accustomed prayers, even for a single day.

And we, bound to meditation by so many motives, by our vocation, and by obedience, exempt from all that could divert us from it, we omit it . . . . not for the purpose of preserving our dignities, our riches, and our life, but through sloth, vanity, or for some slight convenience. . . . We omit it, though we know, though we acknowledge that it is the principal, the necessary means of arriving at true felicity. This it is that consummates the malice of our neglect.

O religious! who attach no importance to this inestimable exercise, enter into yourselves, consider who you are and what you neglect. Heat is not more neces-

sary to life, water is not more indispensable to fish, than meditation is to your soul: destitute of it you are but the phantom of a religious, a dead member, a receptacle of vices, and the sport of hell; and yet you renounce the practice of it.

Meditation is the sinew of virtue, the bulwark of religious discipline; this rampart once destroyed, grace, your vocation, and your salvation are no longer secure. You are not ignorant of these precious prerogatives of so holy an exercise, and yet you dare to yield to sleep during the time allotted for it.

'All that is estimable here below is inferior to meditation.'[1] 'He that has found the spirit of it has found a treasure.'[2] 'All things that are desired on earth are not to be compared with it.'[3] You believe this, and still you abridge, you even omit it for the purest trifles.

How unjust, but, above all, how inexcusable, a behaviour in you, who enrolled yourself in the holy militia, that, in the silence of the cloister, you might give yourself up, with less restraint, to the things of heaven; in you, who are a member of a religious order, whose statutes and rules strenuously prescribe frequent meditation; in you, in fine, who fully comprehend of what injury or advantage this exercise is, according as it is performed with negligence or fidelity. Judge yourself now. Do your knowledge of the value of meditation, and the strict obligation you are under of making it, leave you any exonerating pretext for your sloth, or rather, do they not compel you to own that it is truly deserving of chastisement?

Be astonished at 'your happiness in being able to commune with God, to converse with Jesus Christ, as

[1] St. Greg. of Niss. [2] Eccli. vi. 14. [3] Prov. iii. 15.

often and as long as you please, to be empowered to ask all that you need and to obtain what you ask;'[1] 'to obtain,' says St. Bonaventure, 'a good which exceeds the entire universe in value!' Reflect, also, what an honour is conferred on you in being admitted at all hours into the very sanctuary of the adorable Trinity, without fear of a repulse, since, on the contrary, a formal promise and an express command encourage and oblige you to pray! To deprive yourself of so many favours through indifference is an unpardonable folly. Vile clay! the devils envy thy fate, the saints congratulate thee on it, the angels are in an ecstasy; thou alone esteemest it not!

Did an earthly monarch desire to converse with thee, wouldst thou delay accepting his invitation? The King of kings, the Lord of lords, invites thee to commune with Him, and thou refusest! By the sound of the bell the heavenly Bridegroom says to thy soul: 'Arise, make haste, my beloved, my dove, and come,'[2] and thou turnest a deaf ear to His voice! He offers thee His richest treasures; He desires to dispense to thee a profusion of His gifts, provided thou makest mental prayer, and thy tepidity resists His goodness! O Seraphim, veil your faces with your wings, that you behold not our culpable contempt of an exercise so useful and so honourable to man.

But you say 'I have not time.' Vain excuse! Time is not wanting to you for walking, play, trifles, sleep, recreation, and not one hour remains to you for thinking of God, of your soul, of eternity! You each day find time to spend in pampering a body, which must one day putrefy and become the food of worms, and you cannot

[1] St. Chrys. [2] Cant. ii. 10.

consecrate a moment to meditation, to the nourishment of your immortal soul? Ah! take heed lest grace fail you at length.

Divine Saviour, who hast so forcibly inculcated on Thy apostles the necessity of prayer, banish from our hearts everything that is an obstacle to this holy exercise! Grant us grace henceforth to burn with fervour in meditation, thus to reap the fruit promised to fidelity to this holy exercise, that we may never experience the misfortunes which would be the chastisement of our negligence.

Article III.

Of the obstacles to meditation and the means of making it with fruit.

Mental prayer or meditation is, in the opinion of the Fathers, one of the surest and most efficacious means of making rapid progress in perfection. How astonishing is it, therefore, to see so many Christians meditate daily on the holy truths of the Gospel without fruit and almost without any advancement in sanctity? Many have renounced the world and retired into asylums of piety, and nevertheless they continue slaves to the same vices. The secret is easy of solution: they do not meditate well; behold why it is that they do not improve. To remedy this evil, let us study the chief obstacles to meditation and the best means of making it with fruit.

1. *The obstacles to meditation.*

The first is the defect of preparation. We fall into this fault:

1st. When, instead of anticipating what should form

the subject of our meditation, we commence it abruptly, alighting indiscriminately on the first subject that presents itself, without having made choice of the truth we should consider, and without proposing to ourselves any end to be attained or any fruit to be derived therefrom.

2nd. When we do not select by preference a subject that is practicable and suited to our state.

3rd. When, in preparing our subject, we glance over it confusedly, instead of dividing it into points, which would facilitate it and, at the same time, render it more profitable.

'Before prayer,' says the Holy Ghost, 'prepare thy soul, and be not as a man that tempteth God.'[1] Such should be your conduct, and yet you presume, dust and ashes as you are, to despise this divine admonition. When you desire to speak to one of the great ones of the earth, you not only study what you have to say to him, but even your very expressions; and when you wish to converse with the omnipotent God, 'whose throne is on the Cherubim,'[2] you audaciously penetrate, without the least preparation, into the interior of the palace in which He resides. There are peoples of Asia who, before being admitted to an audience with the sovereign, are obliged to study the ceremonial of the reception for a whole year; and we, to treat of the most important affair with the King of kings, the Lord of lords, intrude ourselves into His presence without any preparation, our eyes still weighed down with sleep; and with a freedom which we would not presume to be guilty of in the presence of one of our fellow-creatures, we yawn, stretch upon a chair or form, as though overcome by weariness. Is not such behaviour a species of con-

[1] Eccli. xviii. 23. [2] 1 Kings iv. 4.

tempt towards Him before whom the Thrones and Powers prostrate themselves in reverent awe, and whose adorable face not even the burning Cherubim dare to contemplate ?

The preparation for meditation consists : 1, in reading the subject of the meditation on the preceding evening; 2, in recalling it for a moment before going to sleep; 3, in revolving it in the mind in the morning, as soon as we awake.

In the evening, when reading the subject of the meditation, we must foresee : 1, the truth on which we propose to meditate; 2, the fruit to be derived therefrom; 3, the affections we should elicit; 4, the pious thought we are to select for a spiritual bouquet, and which will serve to maintain our fervour during the day. It is especially at night when retiring to rest, in the morning on awaking, before and after meals, and finally in our visits to the Blessed Sacrament, that we should recall the spiritual bouquet.

Let us examine our conscience : how have we fulfilled these conditions up to this ? How do we purpose to observe them henceforward ? 'God,' says St. Bernard, 'will come to you according to the preparation you will have made for His reception.'

The second obstacle is to spend too much time in the operations of the mind.

Some prepare the meditation well, but during the prayer itself they attach themselves exclusively to the considerations; they wish to study the truth they meditate under every aspect, and nearly the whole hour has elapsed before they have elicited the acts of virtue proper to confirm them in the good resolutions which they should make.

This fault, as prejudicial as it is frequent, is directly at variance with the principal end of meditation; it diminishes and injures its efficacy, deprives us of several degrees of grace and glory, which we might have obtained by the vivacity and fervour of our affections. Let us, therefore, always devote more time to the affections than to the considerations, to the exercise of the will than to that of the understanding, if we would not reduce our meditation to a mere study. Let us avoid that species of spiritual avarice which would cause us to fathom and exhaust the truth proposed to us, to discover all its bearings; but, when we have found in one of its points the fruit we desire, when we recognise in a good thought the attraction of the Holy Spirit, we must pause, cease our reasoning, and yield up our heart to the divine guidance. At the close of the meditation we may read the remainder of the subject.

Those whose better-trained and more acute mind enables them at once to seize and comprehend the whole sense of the subject they have chosen, should not delay on the consideration, but pass on to the exercise of the will, and abandon themselves to the holy affections which have impressed them most. Should the will begin to relax and languor commence to manifest itself, the consideration and reasoning must be resumed, in order thence to derive new light and strength.

Let us enter into ourselves, and see with what care and attention we have observed these rules; 'for,' says Eusebius Emissemus, 'in proportion to your assiduity in the things of God shall be the graces which He will bestow upon you.'

The third obstacle to meditation is our carelessness in appropriating and applying the subject, affections, and

resolutions of it to the present wants of our soul. Some there are who during meditation forget themselves to think of others, who form grand projects of going into idolatrous nations, sacrificing their lives for Jesus Christ, converting and baptising infidels, leading sinners to repentance, and who, meantime, suffer their rebellious passions to reign uncurbed in their hearts. Oh, what an illusion of self-love! We forget that it is to the infirmity by which our soul is attacked that we should apply the remedy.

Others, during meditation, circumvented and urged on by the devil, beat the air, so to speak: there is no knowing how many good works they propose to themselves to accomplish in the future, while they foolishly allow the disease under which their soul actually labours to increase. Fools! it is the present evil which it is necessary to cure: abandon to the future the care of remedying evils which do not yet exist.

Finally, there are some who apply themselves to the exterior embellishment of their spiritual edifice, whilst the infernal serpent, without hindrance or molestation, devastates the interior of it by the fire of the passions. Blind that we are! we do not see that it is against the enemy that besieges and encompasses us most closely that we should combat most strenuously; that it is to our weakest member we should bring relief; that, in a word, it is for the wants of our own soul, for its actual and most pressing wants, that we should provide.

Have we acted thus? Have we made our meditation in a practical manner? Have we applied ourselves to the cure of our most dangerous spiritual infirmity? Have we not confined ourselves to sterile resolutions, good at best to be executed at some distant date? Have

we not wished to apply the remedy to the evil which was lightest? Let us hasten to correct the defects discovered to us by this examen.

The fourth and last obstacle is to neglect to make resolutions, or to select such as are destitute of the requisite conditions. Of all the infernal machinations against the success of meditation this is indubitably the most insidious, since it ruins its very foundation. A meditation without a resolution is a body without a soul, a tree without fruit, a ring despoiled of its gem; and a resolution devoid of the requisite conditions is a light without heat, an ephemeral flame, a deceitful meteor, which dazzles for a moment, then vanishes for ever from our sight. Let us, then, never neglect to make a resolution accompanied by the conditions necessary to insure its accomplishment.

First condition.—Our resolution should not be vague, general, or extended to many objects; it should be simple, concentrated, and definite. Let us not propose several different things to ourselves at the same time; on the contrary, we should limit ourselves to one or, at most, to two points, resolving to avoid or to do such or such a thing. Let us foresee the choice of the means, the circumstances of the time, of the place, and of the manner, and determine within ourselves where, when, and how we will reduce our good resolution to practice.

Second condition.—Our resolution must be such that it can be accomplished that very day, or at least with the briefest delay possible. The principal fruit of meditation is to sanctify each day that is given us, by 'making us live in the world piously' towards God, 'justly' towards our neighbour, and 'soberly'[1] towards ourselves; but resolutions formed with reference to a distant future

[1] Tit. ii. 12.

are powerless against our passions and are scoffed at by hell.

Third condition.—This we have already indicated in explaining the third obstacle to meditation; however, it is so important that it will not be useless to recommend it once more. Our resolution, then, must apply a remedy to our principal defect, it must tend to correct our capital vice and to acquire the virtue in which we perceive ourselves to be most deficient.

But, 'as we advance in perfection only in proportion to the strength of our resolutions,'[1] and as the amendment of our whole life depends in a great measure on our fidelity in keeping them, we must have recourse to efficacious means to ensure their execution.

1. When we wish to make our resolution, let us place ourselves in spirit before the throne of the Divine Majesty, and in presence of the whole court of heaven; let us represent to ourselves that the angels hear and applaud our promises; let us consecrate to the Blessed Trinity the action which we propose to perform or to avoid, specifying it by name; let us offer it with the prayers of the saints 'on the golden altar which is before the throne of God.'[2]

2. Let us invoke our holy patrons and the saints honoured that day as witnesses, and beg of them to be the guarantees of our promises, consenting that they should become our accusers in the event of our being faithless to them.

3. Let us resign unreservedly to God our honour, health, life, the use of our senses, and the faculties of our soul, being satisfied that His justice should immediately avenge itself upon us should we be guilty of a

[1] Imit. b. i. ch. 19. [2] Apoc. viii. 3.

relapse, and that it should punish us by sickness, the loss of our reputation, or whatever other punishment it pleases.

4. Let us seal our good resolutions with the blood of Jesus Christ, let us deposit them in the wound of His adorable Side, as in sacred archives, whence our angel guardian will withdraw them at the hour of death, to produce them against us, should we have been unfaithful to them.

5. Let us by a voluntary severity impose such or such a penance on ourselves, stipulating to perform it that very day in case we fail in the engagement we have just made.

Oh, how wonderfully rapid should be our progress in virtue were our meditations always accompanied by resolutions so firm and precise! Let us examine ourselves: how have we followed these wise counsels up to this? how do we desire to practise them in future? Let us not be of the number of those who determine to be on their guard, and who, an hour afterwards, act as though they had formed no resolution.[1]

Like an accursed 'cloud which we have ourselves set before us,' these four obstacles hinder 'our prayer from passing through to heaven'[2] and ascending to God. Like a thick and dark fog they obscure the celestial light, obstruct the heat of the Sun of Justice, and mar the growth of virtues in our soul. It is, therefore, of vital importance that we dissipate these clouds, and make the utmost efforts to resuscitate our fervour.

2. *Means of profiting by meditation.*

Let us now come to the means which may assist us to meditate with fruit.

[1] Imit. b. i. ch. 22. [2] Lament. iii. 44.

First means.—It consists in a prudent and invariable use of the preludes. The imagination, always volatile and untractable, goes and returns from one end of the world to the other, attaching itself to the most incongruous objects the moment we cease to curb it by a watchful vigilance; hence to restrain its restless activity, it is imperative on us to attach it to the object of the meditation by some definite ideas, to which we are to lead it back every time it begins to wander. This guard over the imagination allows the soul more facility for comprehending all the parts of the subject on which it meditates, and of drawing more solid and fervent affections from it.

There are generally three preludes.

The first is a general but rapid view of the subject of the meditation, that is to say, of the Christian truth or mystery on which we propose to meditate.

The second is a representation formed by the mind of the place and circumstances in which such a mystery has been accomplished or such a truth revealed.

The third consists in asking the fruit which we desire to reap from the present meditation.

These preludes should—1, be short, otherwise they would not differ from the meditation itself: two minutes at most suffice; 2, they should be expressive, depicting to us, as in a picture, all the circumstances of the mystery we meditate. The more vivid the representation, the less shall our soul be distracted, and the less liable to occupy itself with foreign thoughts.

However, persons whose imagination is somewhat slow should avoid fatiguing the head by seeking thus to portray to themselves the sensible circumstances of the mystery, as for instance the composition of the place

where it was wrought, since this first effort, already painful to the mind, would impair the remainder of the meditation. Those even who find the method of preludes too difficult need not follow it. They may supply it by an act of faith in the presence of God, and by begging His grace to profit by their meditation.

Second means.—It consists in properly directing the exercise of the understanding, that is, to know how to consider and fathom the proposed truth, appropriate it to the state of our soul, and finally, to draw thence practical conclusions conformable to our actual wants. Many, owing to their ignorance of this method, find the exercise of the understanding painful, useless, and even disheartening, and superior to their strength; but in this they deceive themselves.

In reality, is it so difficult to apply one's self seriously to the comprehension of a truth of religion, when it has already been prepared on the previous evening, and afterwards to examine our conscience, in order to see if our life corresponds with our faith, in other words, whether we really live as we believe we are bound to do?

Having done this, is such great heroism required to form a particular resolution, to promise to do such or such a thing at such a time and in such a place? Once again, shall we allege the impossibility of these considerations and of this resolution, when we would not fail to recur to the same expedients in temporal matters?

How persuade ourselves that we are incapable of effecting what is daily done by the agriculturist. From this proposition, to him quite certain, 'Unless I cultivate the ground it will not yield me food,' he wisely concludes, 'I must take care to till my fields;' then descending to details, he determines the time for the tillage, the seed-

sowing and other labours. What! this simple reasoning made by a poor husbandman to insure a good harvest, we are unable to make in order to reap the fruits of virtue!

But to divest our negligence of all excuse the following are different means of applying ourselves to the exercise of the understanding:—1. We may excite the attention of our mind and render the objects in some manner present, by asking ourselves, for instance, what ought I to believe or know on the subject I am meditating? what am I bound to do by the practical truth that results from it? have I done it up to this? what shall I do in future? How, where, when, by what means shall I do it?

2. We shall likewise find abundant matter for consideration in studying the causes, the end, the effects, and the circumstances of the proposed mystery or truth; in reflecting on the facility, the joy, the justice, the advantage, the necessity, and even the honour of keeping the resolution we have taken; in weighing the loss or gain we may expect from it, according as we shall be faithful or not in its fulfilment.

3. It will be easy for us then to continue the exercise of the understanding as long as we shall require it, by proposing to ourselves the following or other similar questions: what advice would I give a friend on this matter? what do the many favours with which God has loaded me, and even my own interest, demand of me in this conjuncture, since if I do what is right I shall increase my merits, I shall acquire a title to a greater recompense in heaven? At the hour of death, at the moment of judgment, on my entrance into eternity, what resolution shall I desire to have taken? By these means, of which habit will constantly facilitate the practice, we shall learn how to

perform the exercise of the understanding without difficulty and even to continue it without aridity.

Let us remark, however: 1, that we must observe *a certain limit* in the exercise of the understanding, and that if we should not allow the mind to languish so as to lapse into tepidity, so, on the other hand, we should avoid all over-straining of it as extremely prejudicial. Our consideration should be calm, but not inert; tranquil, yet energetic and fervent.

2. That we must confine ourselves to one subject, and not undertake the consideration of several at a time: let us confine ourselves to one without pre-occupying ourselves with any other. One large diamond is of more value than several gems of an inferior description. Let us shun all subtlety, curiosity, and vain knowledge. All must be practical, solid, useful, directly tending to strengthen us in the resolution we proposed to ourselves in the preparation of the preceding evening.

3. That we must not prolong the exercise of the understanding too far. This defect usually destroys the whole fruit of the meditation. Those who have a cultivated mind and rich imagination often allow themselves to be seduced by the charms of novelty, and indulge at too great length the conceptions of their genius. It is not right, doubtless, to precipitate the consideration, take a mere cursory glance at the proposed dogma, and hastily relinquish it to pass with equal inattention from that to another; but neither must we dwell unrestrictedly on this part of the meditation, nor, as it were, anatomise the subject to its minutest fibres, as though fearing to lose the least particle of the substance it contains. We should rather so regulate the time of our meditation that the greater portion of it be consecrated to the affections. It

is chiefly in this last point that the difficulty of the practice of meditation consists, consequently it is very important to remove the obstacles it presents.

Third means.—We should have a good method, which would teach us how to elicit acts of the different virtues. It would be well to select models of these acts from safe and esteemed works.[1] As it is easy to appropriate, and even perfect the labour of others, by the aid of those guides, and by adapting their method to our wants, we could easily overcome our difficulties. But should we not possess such works, let us ourselves make a selection from such good and holy thoughts as the Holy Ghost shall inspire us with, or as we shall glean from our spiritual lectures; let us commit them to a note-book, that we may use them during the time of meditation. In the following number we will indicate, in a short analysis, the Acts most appropriate to be elicited during the meditation and the order to be observed in them.

The following are some models of these acts collected from the 'Christianus Pie Moriens,' and drawn from the Psalms:

Act of Faith.

Thy testimonies are true (Ps. xcii. 7); Thou alone art God (lxxxv. 9); Thou wilt render to every one according to his works (li. 11); Thou art God, my Saviour (xxiv. 5).

Act of Adoration.

Come, let us adore and fall down and weep before the Lord that made us; for the Lord is the great God and the

[1] (Note of French translator.) The author recommends 'Easy Way to God,' by Cardinal Bona; 'The Treasury of the Affections of the Heart,' by Blasius Pasina; the Spiritual Works of Avancin, Crasset, Horstius-Merlo; and finally his work, entitled 'Christianus Pie Moriens.'

great King above all gods; He is the Lord our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand (Ps. xciv. 6, 3, 7); Adore Him, all you His Angels (xcvi. 8); Let all the earth adore Thee and sing to Thee (lxv. 4).

Act of Hope.

Lord, my God, in thee have I hoped (Ps. vii. 1); Thou art my protector and my refuge; my God, in Thee will I trust (xc. 2); Save Thy servant, O my God, that trusteth in Thee (lxxxv. 2); The Lord is faithful in all His words, the Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him in truth. He will do the will of them that fear Him, and will hear their prayer and save them (cxliv. 14, 19, and 20).

Act of Charity.

I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength (Ps. xvii. 1); I have loved Thy Commandments above gold and topaz; they are good to me above thousands of gold and silver (cxviii. 127 and 72); Bless the Lord, O my soul: and let all that is within me bless His holy name (cii.).

Act of Fear.

Lord, rebuke me not in Thy indignation, nor chastise me in Thy wrath (Ps. vi. 1); Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight no man living shall be justified (cxlii. 2); Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy face? If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there; if I descend into hell, Thou art present (cxxxviii. 7 and 8).

Act of Sorrow.

Lord, be Thou merciful to me, for I have sinned against Thee (Ps. xl. 5); My eyes have sent forth springs of water: because they have not kept Thy law (cxviii.

136); Remember not the sins of my youth and of my ignorances (xxiv. 7); Remember, O Lord, Thy bowels of compassion and Thy mercies, and forgive me all my sins. For Thy name sake, O Lord, Thou wilt pardon my sin (xxiv. 6, 18, 11.)

Act of Resolution of Amendment.

I have sworn, and am determined to keep the judgments of Thy justice. I will search Thy law; and I will keep it with my whole heart. I will think of Thy justifications, I will meditate on Thy commandments; because they are justice and Thy law is truth. Deal with Thy servant according to Thy mercy, and teach me Thy justifications. I shall always keep Thy law, for ever and ever (Ps. cxviii., cvi., xxxiv., xvi., xv., clxxii., cxlii., cxxiv., and xliv.); If I forget Thee, Lord, let my right hand be forgotten; let my tongue cleave to my jaws, if I do not remember Thee (cxxxvi. 6 and 7).

Act of Humility.

Lord, what is man that Thou art made known to him? or the son of man, that Thou makest account of him? (Ps. cxliii. 3); Thy eyes did see my imperfect being (cxxxviii. 16); I am needy and poor (lxxxv. 1); I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God (lxxxiii. 11); I am a worm and no man: the reproach of men and the outcast of the people (xxi. 7); Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy name give glory (cxiii. 9).

Act of Patience.

My heart is ready, O my God! My heart is ready (Ps. cvii. 1); Forsake me not, O Lord my God; do not Thou depart from me. Attend unto my help, O Lord, the God of my salvation (xxxvii. 22 and 23); I was made

a reproach to the fool; I was dumb, and I opened not my mouth, because it was Thou hadst done it (xxxviii. 9, 12 and 13).

Act of Resignation.

Thou art my aid and my deliverance (Ps. xxxix. 24); I said my lots are in Thy hands (xxx. 15); Thou art my God (lv. 10); I am Thy servant (cxv. 6); Teach me to do Thy will (cxlii. 11); I shall be protected under the covert of Thy wings; for Thou hast been my hope; a tower of strength against the face of the enemy (lx. 5, 4); The Lord is my helper (xxxix. 19).

Act of Thanksgiving.

I will praise Thee, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify Thy name for ever: for Thy mercy is great towards me (Ps. lxxxv. 12, 13); Thou hast formed me and hast laid Thy hand upon me (cxxxviii. 5); Thou hast brought me forth from hell: Thou hast saved me from them that go down into the pit (xxix. 3); Thou hast delivered my soul from death, my feet from falling (lv. 13); Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all He hath done for thee (cii. 2).

Act of Confidence.

The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the protector of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? If armies in camp should stand together against me, my heart shall not fear (Ps. xxvi. 1, 2, 3); The Lord is my helper: I will not fear what man can do unto me (cxvii. 6); The Lord is my helper and protector: in Him hath my heart confided, and I have been helped (xxvii. 7); It is Thou, Lord, who hast settled me in hope (iv. 10).

Act of Desire of Heaven.

I rejoiced at the things that were said to me: we shall go into the house of the Lord (Ps. cxxi. 1); My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord (lxxxiii. 3); As the hart panteth after the fountains of waters, so my heart panteth after Thee, O my God! my soul hath thirsted after the strong living God. When shall I come and appear before the face of God? (xli. 1 and 2); For Thee my soul hath thirsted to see Thy power and Thy glory (lvii. 2 and 3).

The following advice, if observed, will enable us to derive much benefit from this third part of the meditation.

1. Let us direct all our affections to this one end, the confirming ourselves in the resolution we have just taken.

2. As soon as fervour begins to abate in the exercise of the will, let us gently resume that of the understanding so as to reanimate our resolutions by new motives, or even by a reconsideration of those already meditated.

3. Let us rise superior to the too ordinary fear of being unable to maintain the fervour of the affections to the end of the meditation; for should the soul experience any enfeeblement, it may repair its strength by resuming the consideration.

4. Should one affection suffice for a considerable time, we must not feel disturbed even though the end of the meditation should arrive before we have been able to produce any other, for a single sentiment of fervour in a soul that loves avails more than all the movements of a heart that is tepid. The best thing for us to do, therefore, is to abandon ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and to rest calmly on the affection for which His grace has given us most attraction.

Fourth and last means.—We must end our meditation by a short examen in order to recognise the faults committed therein, and to render to ourselves an account of the fruit we have drawn from it. So important is this examen that the masters of the spiritual life advise us to encroach on the hour of meditation, if unable to get any other time, rather than omit it.

Mental prayer, like a resplendent sun, diffuses into the mind a divine light and inflames the heart with the fire of charity; but this luminary itself has its eclipses and sometimes exhibits dark spots. We must observe by means of the examen the cause of the dimness of its light, in order to dissipate the shadow which threatens to overspread its entire disc and veil it from our view. Before leaving meditation let us carefully endeavour to discover the faults which we may have committed, and renew the firm resolution to avoid them in the ensuing meditation.

3. *The method to be observed to produce affections in meditation.*

We have already stated that our soul should affectionately tend and lovingly attach itself to the truth which has been manifested to it in the exercise of the understanding, that it should especially form the generous resolution of conforming its conduct thereto; but unless we possess a method to facilitate the practice of all these acts, it will be almost impossible for our will to perform them beneficially. I have deemed it expedient, therefore, to explain at the end of this chapter the suitable order and method to be observed in producing the affections after the consideration.

1. When we have meditated and understood what

we should avoid or do, when, by a lively faith, we have realised to ourselves the proposed truth, we must humble ourselves profoundly in presence of the Divine Majesty, and express to Him our bitter regret for the faults of which we acknowledge ourselves guilty and for the duties we have neglected.

Our first affection, therefore, should be one of confidence and sorrow. Overwhelmed at the view of our wretchedness, we should humble ourselves beneath all creatures, and with sentiments of the deepest compunction implore pardon of God. This sorrow must necessarily produce in us a determined will to accomplish henceforward the good we have omitted, and to avoid the evil which we have done. But that our good resolutions be efficacious, persevering and calculated to confirm us in virtue they must be accompanied with the conditions[1] and sustained by the means[2] already specified. It is also an excellent practice to repeat and in some way reiterate in presence of God, the chief motives by which His grace has determined us in the choice of our resolution.

2. Once confirmed in the good resolution we have just formed let us make an act of self-diffidence, of fear for our inconstancy in good, a frank avowal of our weakness, instability, and impotence: let us acknowledge that left to ourselves and deprived of grace, we could not fail to be faithless to our promises.

Let us implore the divine grace to come to our assistance and let us dispose ourselves for its reception by an act of firm hope that God's protection will not be wanting to us for its accomplishment. To obtain it, let us ask it—1, of the Father in the name of Jesus Christ;

[1] No. 1 of this Art. [2] No. 2 of same Art.

2, of the Son our Saviour, by His mercy, His wounds, and His death; 3, of the Holy Ghost by His love; 4, of the Blessed Virgin, our patron saints, and those whom the Church particularly honours on that day, conjuring them to unite their supplications to ours to obtain for us from the adorable Trinity the help necessary to keep the resolution we have taken.

Let us present ourselves as mendicants before the throne of Mercy, exposing to God our frailty, poverty, and misery, laying open to Him the wounds inflicted on our soul by sin; in fine, let us manifest to Him the excess of our indigence with that eloquence which want inspires. True, neither the Almighty nor the saints will experience that sensible compassion for our evils which is incompatible with eternal felicity: but our confidence, and, above all, our humility will be pleasing to them, and this vivid delineation of the miseries of our soul will impress on ourselves the necessity of a courageous watchfulness in the fulfilment of the engagements we have just entered into.

3. From this firm hope of the divine assistance naturally proceed affections of burning love for God; 1, We give this Sovereign Master an absolute preference by adjudging our love for Him the precedence over the pleasure or repugnance we experience in executing or omitting the thing to which our resolution refers; 2, We rejoice at the incomprehensible glory which the Almighty possesses in Himself, being He Who Is, and in the exterior glory which redounds to Him from the praise, honour, and adoration of the saints in heaven and of the just on earth, who cease not to proclaim His ineffable goodness; and in fine, in the glory which the fulfilment of our promise will procure

for Him; 3, We excite ourselves to sorrow for having loved the infinite Beauty so late and so coldly, and having even repeatedly offended Him by our negligences in meditation; 4, We declare our determination to prove our love henceforward at least by fidelity in observing our present resolution; 5, We invite all the saints to love this great God, and we offer Him the burning love of the Seraphim to supply for our tepidity.

Fourthly.—These aspirations of love terminate in an intimate union of our heart with the heavenly Spouse, and, if I may dare so to speak, in a transformation into Him, an identification which is wrought by the divine use which we make of our senses and the faculties of the soul. We ascend by three steps to this ineffable union: 1, by banishing from our mind all worldly ideas —in order to give admittance only to eternal truths and a constant attention to the presence of God; 2, by eradicating every erroneous opinion from our mind, and by curing our will of its irregular desires, so that our mind esteem and despise, and our will love or hate only what the saints esteem or contemn, love or hate; 3, in turning away our senses from every inordinate affection, so that they neither touch, taste, hear, feel, nor see the beauty, the attraction, the sweetness, and the perfection of creatures, save in referring them to the One only 'beloved chosen out of thousands,'[1] and that their ardent desire to find Him in all things be such that we may truthfully exclaim with St. Paul, 'I live, but now not I, it is Jesus Christ who lives, thinks, loves, feels, tastes, sees, and speaks to me.'[2]

Fifthly.—This intimate union with the heavenly Spouse produces in its turn a delightful familiarity

[1] Cant. v. 10. [2] Gal. ii. 20.

between His Heart and ours. We speak to Him now as to our Father, our Friend, our Brother; now as to our Physician, our Judge, our Master. We ask of Him the help and consolation of which we stand in need; we expose to Him our temptations and our miseries, we consult Him in our doubts, and treat with Him concerning the affair of our salvation; in a word, we enjoy with filial respect all the sweetness of His conversation and society. Let us beware, however, of monopolising all the talk to ourselves; we must be careful to allow God to speak to us, and listen with attention and docility to His words, His threats, and His admonitions.

We should even frequently conjure Him to make known His will to us, saying with Samuel: 'Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth.'[1] O God of my heart, what is it that displeaseth Thee in me? what defect, what sinful affection, what vice saddens Thee most? what wouldst Thou have me begin from this very moment to avoid or to do? Of what created object, of what inclination dost Thou demand the sacrifice? Then suspending for a moment the three faculties of the soul, let us listen with profound humility, in silence and peace, to the divine reply which will make itself interiorly audible to our heart. Let us have confidence: the Eternal Word will often deign to impart to us admirable secrets.

Should there be any particular business regarding ourselves or our neighbour about which we are perplexed and undecided, this is the moment in which to consult God in order to learn His will before acting. Should we have time, we may add to these affections acts of patience, conformity to the divine will, obedience,

[1] 1 Kings iii. 10.

thanksgiving, and others of a similar nature conformable to the subject of the meditation and proper to confirm us in the resolution with which grace has inspired us. Let us steadfastly adhere to this method which teaches us the order and the manner to be observed in eliciting the affections · let us constantly make use of the directions for makii · meditation given in this article, and in a short time we shall have mastered this divine art which is not merely useful, but even necessary for our sanctification and the shortest and safest road to perfection.

'Meditation,' says St. Denis, 'is the table prepared by Divine Wisdom in the house which He has built, and whereon He has placed bread and wine, the bread of life and understanding, of everlasting and solid truths; the wine of holy desires and affections of joy and gladness in the Holy Ghost.'[1] Let us therefore listen with avidity and gratitude to this adorable Wisdom, inviting us to His table in these words of Solomon: 'Come, eat my bread and drink the wine which I have mingled for you. Forsake childishness, and walk by the ways of prudence.'[2] Let us study them: in them we shall acquire true knowledge, we shall learn to overcome the obstacles found in the practice of meditation and to employ with fruit the means for making it well.

CHAPTER III.

OF INTERIOR RECOLLECTION.

INTERIOR recollection is a continual attention to the presence of God: the means of preserving it are assiduity in remaining in our room, the observance of silence, and

[1] On Epis. to Titus. [2] Prov. ix. 5, 6.

the avoidance of dissipating occupations. Without interior recollection the acquisition of solid virtue is impossible. This truth will be evident when we have demonstrated: 1, the happy state of a recollected soul; 2, the miserable state of a dissipated one. In a third article we shall develop the means already indicated for the preservation of recollection.

Article I.

The happy state of a recollected soul.

1. *It has found a powerful preservative against sin and weariness.*

Recollection consists, as we have already said, in a vigilant attention to the presence of God: now, the first fruit of this attention is to preserve us from numberless falls. A lively faith in this truth: God is here; He is here, 'the God who shall whet His sword as the lightning, and whose hand shall take hold on vengeance.' He is the continual witness and the infallible judge of all my works. He hears my words, sees my actions, penetrates my thoughts, encompasses and pervades my whole being by his immensity. His power sustains me, His knowledge fathoms my whole being, His wisdom governs me, His love supports me, preserves me, and clasps me tenderly to His paternal bosom; He lends Himself in some sort to my will by co-operating in all my actions, of which He will one day be the remunerator or the avenger; in a word, this Sovereign Monarch of heaven and earth is intimately present to me in the grandeur of His infinite perfections; His watchful eye beholds and appreciates everything even in its minutest details; nothing escapes Him. Yes, this sole thought is

an effectual and powerful curb to arrest us for ever on the path of evil.

Who would have the audacity to commit, under the eyes of an all-holy God, if he really believed Him close to him, a fault which he would be ashamed to commit in presence of a man? 'Alas!' cries out the Royal Prophet, 'the ways of the sinner are corrupt and abominable, because God dwells not in the thoughts of his heart.'[1]

From this fatal and culpable forgetfulness proceed levity, relaxation, and corruption of morals; imprudence, malignant intemperance of the tongue, the liberty of the senses, and all the untold sins which so frequently sully the conscience of man. 'The fool saith in his heart'[2] who sees me? 'whom do I fear? no man seeth me, and the Most High will not remember my sins.'[3] 'The clouds are His covert, and He doth not consider our things.'[4]

Deplorable and fatal mistake! the sinner 'driveth from his soul the fear of God.'[5] Behold the fruit which he reaps from his impiety. Unfortunate man! 'he understandeth not that *His* eye seeth all things,'[6] 'who will bring evil men to an evil end.'[7]

But, on the contrary, the continual remembrance of this truth: 'The Lord seeth,'[8] this Lord, 'who hath on His garment and on His thigh written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.'[9] 'I stand in the sight'[10] of this Judge, who will one day demand a severe account of even a useless word, and who can plunge me into hell at any moment: yes, this remembrance is 'the shield of salvation,'[11] against which all the darts of passion are shattered; 'it is a strong tower,' impregnable to all the assaults of hell, a 'city of refuge'[12] from the deceitful blandishments of the world.

[1] Ps. xiii. 1. [2] Ibid. [3] Eccli. xxiii. 26. [4] Job xxii. 14.
[5] Eccli. xxiii. 27. [6] Ibid. [7] Matt. xxi. 41. [8] Gen. xxii. 14.
[9] Apoc. xix. 16. [10] 4 Kings iii. 14. [11] 2 Kings xxii. 36. [12] Josue xxi. 36.

The eye of the Divine Majesty sees all things, His ear hears all things. This salutary thought suffices to repress the strongest temptations, to cool the ardour of the passions, to place a bridle on the tongue, to restrain the hand on the point of doing evil; there is no temptation which it does not surmount, no irregular desire which it does not quell, no seduction which it does not foil, no fall which it does not prevent. 'The most shameful passions,' says St. Ephrem, 'vanish before the brightness of this light; they take flight as a criminal at the approach of vengeance.'

What! if the eye of the master incites the servant to labour; if the presence of the general inspires his troops with courage on the day of battle; if the person of the prince impresses his courtiers with respect; if at the sight of St. Bernardine his fellow-students ceased their licentious conversation, what power will not 'the eyes of the Lord, far brighter than the sun, beholding round about all the ways of men, and looking into the hearts of men, into the most hidden parts,'[1] exercise over us?

Yes, O just Judge of all our actions! were we to believe with a living faith that Thine eyes are ever upon us, with Joseph we would cry out at the first onset of temptation, 'How can I!' ah! how can 'I do this wicked thing,'[2] 'before the eyes'[3] of the incorruptible Judge, 'who will render to everyone according to his works?'[4]

It is certain, therefore, that the constant remembrance of God's presence, and consequently interior recollection, which is its fruit, preserves us from innumerable faults. Oh! who will give me the wings of the great eagle of the Apocalypse, 'to fly away into the desert,'[5] where

[1] Eccli. xxiii. 28. [2] Gen. xxxix. 9. [3] Ps. xvii. 25.
[4] Apoc. xxii. 12. [5] Ibid. xii. 14.

He alone, whose 'delights are to be with the children of men,'[1] comes to dwell in and take possession of my soul?

But it is equally certain that assiduity in remaining in our room, the observance of silence, and shunning of news, public reports, and over-dissipating occupations, while maintaining us in interior recollection, preserve us also from countless vexations, sufferings, and afflictions, in which too frequent communications with men almost inevitably involve us; for where men are, there likewise are vices; and we rarely hold long conversations without finding our conscience wounded by some empoisoned shafts, which inflict deep anguish on the heart, which afterwards desires to enter into itself.

The pious author of the 'Imitation' acknowledges with an ancient philosopher 'that as often as he had been amongst men he returned less a man.'[2] The Spouse of the Canticles herself, leaves her home for a moment, and does not return till she has been struck, wounded, and despoiled of her mantle. You are not stronger than the virtuous A'Kempis, nor more holy than the Beloved of the heavenly Bridegroom; how, then, can you be astonished when you give yourself up to human conversations to find disgust, instead of the satisfaction you sought for, and to bring from them 'only a weight on your conscience and dissipation of heart?'[3]

If you desire to keep yourself irreprehensible, 'withdraw from superfluous talk and idle visits, from giving ear to news and reports; love to remain hidden; retire into your chamber and shut out the tumult of the world. The cell continually dwelt in groweth sweet, but ill-guarded begetteth weariness.'[4] This is a truth we have all experienced. Who can deny that very often useless conversations have been fraught for him with regret?

[1] Prov. viii. 31. [2] Imit. b. i. ch. 20. [3] Ibid. [4] Ibid.

Hadst thou not quitted thy cell and hearkened to rumours, how far better wouldst thou have preserved true peace!' but 'the moment thou tookest pleasure in hearing news, thou must from thence suffer disturbance of heart.'

Having then learned to be wise at thy own expense, 'shut thy door, and leave to fools the pursuit of vanity,'[1] for what interest canst thou have in learning what takes place in the world if thou art ignorant of what passes in thy own heart?

Finally, do not disquiet yourself with too many, perhaps, vain cares, or with the business of others. Do not seek to dispense with others in order to do everything yourself, and beware of ill-timed officiousness, if you would not be overwhelmed with difficulties. Be the master, not the slave, of the occupations to which your employment obliges you; lend, but never give yourself to them; never allow them to engross you exclusively, and never work so absolutely for creatures as to lose the remembrance of God: in this way you shall be always superior to your occupations, inaccessible to tedium, and your room will become for you an abode of tranquillity and peace.

Exterior man! how long wilt thou continue to stray away from thyself? How long wilt thou continue to exile thyself from thy own heart, to run after the world? Abide within thyself; restore thyself to thyself; occupy thyself with thy own interests; during thy sojourn on the theatre of this world, that is during the time of thy mortal life, be for thyself at once the actor and the spectator. Live for God: it is a sufficiently noble part to accomplish; whatever thou dost, do it for Him alone:

[1] Imit. b. i. ch. 20.

let this be the great, the sole object of thy life, and thou wilt merit the applause of heaven.

Say then, with a generous determination: Henceforth 'I will shun' all dissipating occupations. 'I will fly away, and I will abide in the wilderness.'[1] 'I will sit solitary, and hold my peace.'[2] 'I will set the Lord always in my sight,' and never will I forget, O Sovereign Creator of the universe, that 'Thou art at my right hand,'[3] continually beholding all my actions. Therefore, I will make for myself a solitude in the depth of my heart, where, shielded from the shafts of sin, I will die to the world and live for Thee alone.

2. *A very efficacious means of attaining perfection.*

Interior recollection is a very powerful means of attaining perfection in a short time. In effect our sanctification consists in the faithful accomplishment of our daily duties, since in fulfilling them well we do what God wills and as He wills. Now, there is nothing which better prepares us to perform them well than the practice of interior recollection, which is a loving and continual attention to the presence of the Supreme Judge, from whom 'everyone will receive, according as he hath done whether it be good or evil.'[4] 'The Lord sees;' 'God is witness; He is present, and beholdeth me.'[6] The frequent remembrance of this thought possesses a marvellous power, a supernatural strength to animate our sloth, inflame our fervour, purify our intention, eradicate our faults, and invest our most ordinary and insignificant actions with value in the sight of God, and to render them meritorious for ourselves. Yes, this

[1] Ps. liv. 8. [2] Lament. iii. 28. [3] Ps. xv. 8.
[4] 2 Cor. v. 10. [5] 1 Kings xvi. 7. [6] Gen. xxxi. 50.

thought of the presence of God is a most suitable means of acquiring perfect sanctity. According to St. Bonaventure, it is even absolutely necessary; 'I am convinced,' says he, 'that recollection is the most requisite of all the practices of piety, and the most calculated to elevate us to a high degree of perfection.'

The masters of the spiritual life teach that without recollection there is nothing to be hoped for as regards our perfection. According to St. Ignatius, solitude of the soul is the mother and guardian of all virtues. Destitute of it, never could we either acquire or preserve them; without it, never has anyone attained, nor can anyone ever attain, perfection. On the contrary, the more faithful a person is to preserve this precious solitude, the more certain it is that he will make rapid progress in sanctity: this is a fact proved by experience, besides being quite conformable to the principles of reason.

For, unless our understanding be enlightened by the rays of grace, unless our will be animated by the salutary inspirations of the Holy Ghost, we are incapable of making one step in the way of justice. This is a dogma of faith;[1] but it is likewise true that the recollected soul, like a transparent sea, always calm and tranquil in the presence of God, alone is capable of receiving these graces profitably, and consequently of advancing in virtue.

The dissipated soul, on the contrary, always a stranger to itself, is a bottomless abyss, which uselessly absorbs the divine inspirations, a rock against which the tumult of the passions stifles the voice of grace; blind, it sees not the light which is sent from on high; deaf, it hears not the breath of the Holy Spirit; hard as a rock, it is

[1] Coun. Orange, Can. 7; Counc. Trent, Sess. vi. Can. 3.

callous to celestial impressions; obdurate, it resists the most efficacious means of conversion. And as, in the road to virtue, not to advance is to recede, not alone will this soul fail to make any progress in perfection, but it will go on relapsing, till at length it falls into the greatest disorders.

How different the spectacle presented by a soul enamoured of interior recollection: it does not run, it flies in the paths of sanctity; it advances more in one day than a dissipated soul does in a century. In the sacred Canticle the Sulamitess is styled 'black, small,'[1] and weak at the beginning of her conversion; they 'make her a bed of aromatical spices,'[2] 'they stay her up with flowers; they compass her about with apples'[3] to sustain her; but from the moment that the King 'has brought her into His storerooms,'[4] that is, when, by recollection, He has admitted her to familiar communication with Him, she becomes 'strong as death,' elevated as 'a tower,' beautiful 'as the flowers of Carmel, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array.'[5] How many graces combined! Oh, how secure and salutary a means of perfection is interior solitude!

Surely he who habitually lives in close familiarity with the Sovereign Power, Infinite Wisdom and Boundless Sanctity, could not fail either in the strength, or the light, or the zeal requisite to compass, to realise, and to desire perfection: he has no reason, therefore, to fear the three chief causes of our spiritual indigence, namely, impotence, ignorance, and sloth. Behold why it is that the heavenly Spouse teaches, by the Prophet Osee, that it is in solitude, and there alone, that He will impart to

[1] Cant. i. 4. [2] Ibid. vi. 1. [3] Ibid. ii. 5.
[4] Ibid. i. 3. [5] Ibid. vi. 9.

chosen souls the science of the saints. 'I will lead her into the wilderness, and there I will speak to her heart.'[1]

Oh, adorable, omnipotent Being, higher than heaven, deeper than hell, longer than the earth, broader than the sea,'[2] 'let Thy voice sound in my ears,'[3] and let it intimate to me anew the great precept given to Abraham, 'Walk before me, and be perfect.'[4] But in consequence of my having 'forgotten Thee,'[5] 'my spirit hath swooned away.'[6] 'My strength hath left me.'[7] I dread the verification of this awful threat in my regard: 'because thou art poured out like water, thou shalt not grow.'[8] Avert from me, O Lord, so dire a chastisement. 'I will walk in Thy sight all the days of my life.'[9] 'I will dispose steps in my heart to ascend incessantly from virtue to virtue.'[10]

3. *The source of the choicest graces.*

Like the salutary river, 'which flows from the paradise of delights,'[11] interior recollection inundates the soul with innumerable and most choice graces. It is the happy source whence originate that union, that familiarity, and that incomprehensible communication with God, whose sweetness and price no one can understand, unless he have experienced it. 'Many are the Lord's visits to the man of interior life, and sweet His communications with him. His consolation is delightful: plenteous His peace, and His familiarity astonishing beyond measure.'[12]

2. There it is that the Holy Spirit imparts to us interiorly the firm and consolatory assurance of the remission of our sins and of God's paternal love towards us.

[1] Osee ii. 14. [2] Job xi. 8, 9. [3] Cant. ii. 14. [4] Gen. xvii. 1.
[5] Deut. xxxii. 18. [6] Ps. lxxvi. 4. [7] Ibid. xxxvii. 11. [8] Gen. xlix. 4.
[9] Ibid. xxiv. 40. [10] Ps. lxxxiii. 7. [11] Gen. ii. 10. [12] Imit. b. ii. ch. 1.

The sweet testimony that we are in the state of grace, and in the divine friendship, produces, in its turn, an inestimable and imperturbable interior peace and consolation, a joy which is altogether angelic.

3. From interior recollection likewise proceed heroic courage in adversity; a perfect indifference which neither ambitions nor fears anything; an unconquerable abhorrence of everything earthly, an activity which invariably tends heavenwards; an exquisite delicacy of conscience which shrinks from even the semblance of sin; a marvellous facility, a generous promptitude and an agility in the practice of virtue, especially that of corporal mortification; a noble attraction for heavenly things, the remembrance of which captivates the soul, inflames it with love, and lures it away from earth.

4. To so many priceless favours let us unite the more frequent celestial inspirations, the continual lights, the vivid and sublime knowledge of eternal truths with which a recollected soul is favoured. The Holy Ghost Himself becomes in some degree its master: He ceases not to instruct it, He dissipates its doubts, reveals to it His secrets, teaches it what it ought to do, shows it what it ought to avoid: He protects and guards it with more than a mother's tenderness.

O happy solitude! 'Thou art' truly 'an infinite treasure to man.'[1] Thou teachest 'the knowledge of God.'[2] Yes, 'I am enamoured of Thy beauty; I purpose to take Thee to live with me and take Thee for my Spouse,'[3] never will I permit myself any variance with or any divorce from Thee, knowing that 'Thou wilt communicate to me the good things'[4] in which Thou dost abound. I will allow myself no repose, 'till I

[1] Wisd. vii. 14. [2] Ibid. viii. 4. [3] Ibid. viii. 2, 9. [4] Ibid. viii. 9.

bring Thee into my house and into the interior '[1] of my soul; for 'Thy spirit is sweet above honey,'[2] therefore 'is it that the innocent and upright have adhered to Thee.[3]

4. *A paradise on earth.*

A soul which encloses itself in its own heart to watch over its motions emulates the blessed. By a miracle as surprising as it is uncommon, it performs here below, as far as in it lies, what the saints do in heaven. In imitation of them it beholds the adorable Trinity always present, it gives it the preference and loves it above all things. It attaches itself closely to God by the understanding and the will, uniting itself inseparably to Him 'with the bands of love.'[4] It is all to its Beloved, and its Beloved is all to it in all things. 'God and I:' such is its device, as though He and it were alone in the universe.

Peace, consolations, fervour, joy, and an unbounded and imperturbable confidence, 'have fallen to it as an inheritance.' Like the saints in heaven, it also enjoys in this valley of tears an anticipated beatitude. Inebriated in a torrent of delights, it remains happily plunged therein. Despising all things else, oblivious of self, absorbed in God, it sees but Him in all creatures, and it sees these only in their Creator. Isolated from earthly things, it tastes in a profound solitude the happy fruits of an ineffable union with its Beloved.

Like the angels, who, when deputed by the Most High to execute His behests, bear their felicity about with them; the interior soul, though engaged in various avocations, uninterruptedly possesses a paradise in its heart; never for a moment does it cease to contemplate

[1] Cant iii. 4. [2] Eccli. xxiv. 27. [3] Ps. xxiv. 21. [4] Osee xi. 4.

and love the Divine Majesty. It tends to the accomplishment of the will of its God as the happy goal of its aspirations. Participating in the peace of the elect, it lives devoid of fear and anxiety, because it knows that 'the eyes of the Lord are upon the just,'[1] and that 'He is their helper and protector.'[2] In the excess of its confidence it cries out with the Royal Prophet: 'Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me.'[3] Though hell in all its fury should arise against me; no, 'I will not fear.' The thought 'that Thou art with me' is an impenetrable buckler. Though they should cast me like Jonas into the sea, like Daniel into the lions' den, like Joseph into a well or a prison, still I would not fear, because 'Thou wouldst go down with me into the pit and in bands, Thou wouldst not leave me;'[4] well then may a recollected soul be compared to 'a fair and cloudless sky.'[5]

What are now our sentiments? does not felicity such as this suffice to stimulate our fervour? This familiar intimacy with God, the fruit of recollection, is an antidote against sin and weariness, the focus in which the divine light concentrates, the centre towards which holy inspirations gravitate, the channel through which grace is dispensed, the couch whereon Jesus Christ reposes, the principle of sanctity, the nutriment of interior peace, a peace 'which surpasseth all understanding.'[6] To participate in this happiness it is not necessary to ascend into heaven, to traverse the seas, or to descend into the bosom of the earth: it suffices that, like Arsenius, we fly, conceal ourselves, keep silence, and take refuge within ourselves. 'Let us always think of God, and

[1] Ps. xxxiii. 16. [2] Ibid. xxxii. 20. [3] Ibid. xxii. 4.
[4] Wisd. x. 13. [5] Exod. xxiv. 10. [6] Phil. iv. 7.

our soul shall be transformed into a heaven inhabited by angels.'[1] What! we believe that interior recollection possesses all these advantages, and we still hesitate what course to adopt! Fools that we are! we prefer a dreary exile in the midst of the world to that true country which our soul finds within itself and where it enjoys a foretaste of everlasting peace! Let us then seriously reflect on our conduct.

A soul attentive to God and to itself is that spouse adorned who elicits the admiration of the angels, who 'goeth up by the desert' of interior recollection, flowing with delights 'and leaning' on her Beloved, 'who ascends as a pillar of smoke,'[2] and constantly tends heavenwards by the ardour of her desires; and notwithstanding all this, its happy lot fails to stimulate our sloth, we have not the generosity to emulate its example! It is the chosen reservoir of the heavenly dew; the kingdom of peace where all blessings unite; a paradise on earth, rich and abounding in delights; and we have the hardihood to prefer a stormy sojourn in this valley of tears in which we are condemned to live as exiles.

Oh! how differently we shall judge, at the approach of death, of the treasures contained in the practice of interior recollection. Oh, inestimable treasure concealed in the solitude of the heart! Oh, bed strewn with flowers whereon the heavenly Bridegroom joyfully reposes! throne of ivory on which the true Solomon reigns unrivalled! 'enclosed garden' where no vice has admittance! 'sealed fountain,'[3] whose waters are purer than crystal! charity begets thee, strength sustains thee, modesty accompanies thee, all the virtues adorn thee,

[1] St. Nilus. [2] Cant. iii. 6. [3] Cant. iv. 12.

'riches and glory are with thee;'[1] 'he that shall find thee shall find life, and shall have salvation from the Lord'[2] who is its source.

How prudent is he who unreservedly sacrifices all things to purchase the blessings contained in thee! but how foolish he who lives on indifferent to so many graces! How great has been my error when I suffered these treasures to elude my grasp, and be wasted on created things when 'I became as a dove that is decoyed, not having a heart;'[3] 'but I will return again to God: yes, I will seek Him ten times as much as I have strayed from Him.'[4]

My God 'who art always among us,'[5] permit not that, residing in my heart, Thou shouldst dwell there as in a loathsome prison, wherein Thou wouldst behold only shameful images, hear but follies, perceive but iniquity. Rather adorn with virtues and graces this heart which Thou hast chosen as Thy tabernacle, that Thou mayest not disdain 'to come and make Thy abode there.'[6]

Article II.

Unhappy state of a dissipated soul.

Jesus Christ in the Gospel represents a dissipated soul under the figure of a bundle of vine branches. 'He who remaineth not in me shall be cast forth as a' useless 'branch, he shall wither,' they shall bind him, 'they shall cast him into the fire, and he shall burn.'[7] These words which express under an alarming simile the four kinds of evils with which this soul is threatened, are at the same time a salutary warning to avoid them.

[1] Prov. viii. 18. [2] Ibid. viii. 35. [3] Osee vii. 11. [4] Baruch iv. 28.
[5] Jerem. xiv. 9. [6] John xiv. 23. [7] John xv. 6.

1. *Divine Providence in some measure rejects it.*

The primary misfortune of a dissipated soul is a sort of expulsion from the paternal bosom of Divine Providence, followed by an almost absolute impotence to find ingress again into its own heart. It shall be cast forth. As the branch lopped off from the trunk ceases to be the recipient of the cares of the vine dressers, as it is irrevocably cast out of the vineyard and trampled under foot by the passengers, so a soul who, weary of solitude, pours herself out on exterior things, is rejected with disgust by the Divine Father of the family from the bosom of His special providence: it is persecuted and maltreated by its enemies. It plunges, it disappears, so to speak, in the mire of its vices; it even becomes so enfeebled as to be almost incapable of ever gaining readmission into its own heart by recollection: it shall be cast forth. Oh, heavens! who would not dread so awful a malediction! But let us examine its circumstances more minutely.

A dissipated soul renders itself unworthy of that providential care and special protection of God which formed an impenetrable wall against the darts of the enemy. Nor should this surprise us: such a soul, rarely present to itself, still more rarely attentive to the presence of God, closes its eyes to the divine light; it is deaf to the divine inspirations, rebellious to grace, and gradually becomes earthly, sensual, and altogether carnal. It thinks but of vanity, relishes only sensible objects and what flatters its appetites.

Its memory is a public thoroughfare, into which all sorts of thoughts and imaginations have free admittance. Its understanding is a deserted house, whence

the windows and doors have been carried off, where all temptations arrive in myriads and enter without impediment. Its will is an elastic ball which each tumultuous movement of its heart causes to bound and rebound. Is it to be wondered at that the deplorable state of this soul 'fills' the compassionate Heart of the Redeemer 'with bitterness,'[1] and exasperates Him to such an extent as to induce Him to abandon it to itself, withdraw from it the special protection with which He had encompassed it to ensure its salvation, refuse it the tender embraces to which He formerly deigned to admit it, leave it 'to walk through hard ways,'[2] 'after the flocks,'[3] that is, 'after its own lusts,'[4] which make it the prey to vexations, expose it unarmed to the attacks of hell, place it in proximate danger of offending mortally, and which often really sully it with sin?

This wretched soul opens its eye, it is true, from time to time, and acknowledges its misfortune and the dangerous state of its conscience, which it deplores and endeavours to escape. Tired of sensuality, disgusted with creatures and oppressed with weariness, recalling bygone happiness, groaning beneath its present miseries, it longs, it strives to return to itself, to seek refuge once more in the delightful solitude of interior recollection.

However, as without a more than ordinarily powerful grace this return is impossible, and as the divine vengeance, by a just retaliation, oftens refuses, or at least postpones granting this assistance, it is compelled to endure the equitable and painful banishment from its own heart, it shall be cast forth. Wandering in a foreign country, a fugitive like the prodigal child, exiled far from itself, it has no other nutriment than the food of unclean

[1] Job xxvii. 2. [2] Wisd. v. 7. [3] Cant. i. 7. [4] 2 Pet. iii. 3.

animals; it still casts a wistful glance towards the happy interior peace which it has lost, that fertile region where manna is gathered in abundance; it would fain return, but finding the way obstructed by thorns, bereft of the efficacious succours of grace, repulsed, rejected by men, forsaken by God, and despairing of His return, it remains plunged in anguish, unable to escape this accumulation of afflictions.

Beholding the interior of its heart by a serious examination, as Ezechiel 'saw the interior of the Temple through a hole that he had digged in the wall,'[1] like the Prophet it sees 'the abomination of desolation'[2] exercising undisputed sway there. Its memory is laden with vain and shameful reminiscences, its mind is a receptacle of rash and erroneous judgments, its will is sullied by depraved and criminal desires, figured by the reptiles and animals shown to the Prophet, and which abounded in the Temple. Filled with despair, it no longer ventures to retrace its steps. Unfortunate soul! enslaved by dissipation, the habit of which waxing stronger with years, eventually becomes a kind of necessity, it is an alien to itself, oblivious of its God, devoted exclusively to exterior objects, and its degrading propensities cease only with life.

Should these considerations be insufficient to inspire us with a horror of so great an evil, let us beware lest 'we perish at the time when we shall be scattered,'[3] lest 'our bones be scattered,' and thrown 'by the side of hell;'[4] in other words, lest we be exposed to commit mortal sin, because 'our designs shall be brought to nothing,'[5] and wasted on sensible objects.

[1] Ezech. viii. 7. [2] Mark xiii. 14. [3] Job vi. 17.
[4] Ps. cxl. 7. [5] Prov. xv. 22.

Full well 'I know that it is an evil and a bitter thing to have left the Lord, my God.'[1] Oh, good Shepherd! take pity on a poor sheep who flees from Thee, and who wanders in 'hard places;' should it not wish to return, lead it back in spite of itself, by sending it severe trials, restore it to itself, that it may no longer live except for Thee by the practice of recollection.

2. *An interior aridity dries up its devotion.*

The second evil produced by dissipation is an aridity, a disgust of the soul for everything that relates to piety: 'it shall wither.' The branch, separated from the vine, withers, a similar fate awaits the soul cut off from the Mystical Vine, which is Jesus Christ; the most impressive mysteries of faith, the adorable Sacrament of the Eucharist, and meditation, that fructifying dew, leave it more sterile than the rock; for it heaven possesses no charms sufficiently sweet, neither does hell nor the judgments of God possess terrors sufficiently awful. It reads and meditates unmoved eternal truths calculated to melt the hardest hearts; incapable of comprehending heavenly things, it possesses no aptitude for being moulded, save on earthly ones; its understanding is a profound darkness, its will a desolate waste, its heart the prey of a thousand tumultuous desires. Its meditations, vocal prayers, above all, the recitation of the Office, its offering of the Holy Sacrifice, its communions, examens, confessions, all its spiritual exercises, are but a tissue of distractions, an assemblage of faults, a fatal spiritual lethargy. In a word, the dissipated soul withers like the ivy of Jonas, like the barren fig-tree cursed by Jesus Christ, and like the seed cast into stony

[1] Jerem. ii. 19.

soil: an utterly useless tree, this soul produces neither the fruits of solid virtue, nor the foliage which gives promise of them. Owing to its aridity, it is but a noxious plant, injurious to itself and others: it shall wither.

Can we be surprised at this? Man can as little advance in justice without the divine aid as 'the rush be green without moisture or the sedge-bush grow without water.'[1] But grace penetrates with difficulty a heart whose affections are poured out on created objects. When Holofernes besieged Bethulia, 'he commanded the acqueduct' which supplied the inhabitants of the city with water 'to be cut off,'[2] so likewise Divine Justice interrupts the course of its graces in regard to a soul which has rendered itself unworthy of them by levity and dissipation, and which has forsaken the living fountain 'to dig for itself broken cisterns,' though it has repeatedly experienced 'that they could hold no water.'[3]

Oh! how often has not the heavenly Bridegroom, knocking and waiting at the door of thy heart, tenderly solicited admittance, saying: 'Open to me, my sister, my spouse, for my head is full of dew, and my locks of the drops of the night;'[4] but thou, unhappy soul, a stranger to thyself, thou didst close thy ear to His voice. He persisted in His entreaties. 'Return, return, O Sulamitess, that we may behold thee;'[5] 'and thy ear did not hear His word, admonishing thee behind thy back.'[6] Thou didst refuse to return to Him, and to abide within thyself, because thou wert occupied with trifles.

What wonder, then, that driven, like another Agar, from the bosom of Abraham, 'wandering in the wilderness,'[7] deprived of spiritual water whereby to extinguish

[1] Job viii. 11. [2] Judith vii. 6. [3] Jerem. ii. 13. [4] Cant. v. 2. [5] Cant. vi. 12. [6] Isaias xxx. 21. [7] Gen. xxi. 14.

your thirst, you succumbed to lassitude, and have been forced to cry out in the bitterness of your heart, 'my soul is as earth without water;'[1] 'the Lord hath made me desolate, wasted with sorrow all the day long.'[2]

'Thou wouldst not have the blessing, and it shall be far from thee.'[3] Thou hast loathed the fortifying wine of grace, and by a just retribution thou shalt experience the ardours of a consuming thirst; thou hast chosen aridity of heart, and aridity has struck and withered up all thy faculties. 'Dry bones,' hear the words of the Lord:[4] 'I have called,' says He, I have waited, I have offered to send dew down from heaven; 'I have stretched out My hand, and there was none that regarded; I will laugh'[5] in my turn; I will mock 'when thou shalt have withered away like grass.'[6]

'Thou art just, Lord, and Thy judgment is right.'[7] I acknowledge that 'I have followed the wanderings of my own heart;'[8] 'my thoughts are dissipated,' 'tormenting my heart.'[9] 'My soul is dry;'[10] 'it is consumed within me,'[11] 'as stubble'[12] is consumed by fire. But Thou who commandest 'the fountains of the deep and the flood-gates of heaven,'[13] grant that what 'was dry' may become 'a pool, and that fountains of water may spring up to refresh my thirsty soul,'[14] and that attracted by Thy divine sweetness it may return to interior solitude, to live therein henceforward.

[1] Ps. cxlii. 6. [2] Lament. i. 13. [3] Ps. cviii. 18. [4] Ezech. xxxvii. 4. [5] Prov. i. 24. [6] Isaias li. 12. [7] Ps. cxviii. 137. [8] Isaias lvii. 17. [9] Job xvii. 11. [10] Numb. xi. 7. [11] Lament. iii. 20. [12] Nahum. i. 10. [13] Gen. viii. 2. [14] Isaias xxxv. 7.

3. *It is no longer useful for the salvation of our neighbour.*

A soul which abandons itself to dissipation renders itself unworthy and incapable of being the instrument of God for the salvation of its brethren: it shall be cast into the fire. That such is the chastisement reserved for it is proved by this striking apostrophe of the Lord to Ezechiel: 'Son of man, what shall be made of the wood of the vine,' when it shall be cut and withered? 'Shall wood be taken of it, to do any work? or shall a pin be made of it, for any vessel to hang thereon?' . . . no, 'behold it is cast into the fire for fuel; how shall it be useful for any work?'[1]

It would be impossible to express more forcibly the worthlessness of this wood compared with 'all the other trees of the forest.'[2] It will not even admit of being fastened to the wall, for the purpose of suspending, and thus preserving, the fragile furniture of the household; how could the most consummate skill succeed in fashioning it into a handsome piece of sculpture?

'The wood of the vine,' says St. Augustine, 'when it is cut cannot serve the agriculturist for his instruments, nor can it be wrought by the artisan.' 'Other wood,' says St. Jerome, 'when thrown into the fire at least yields charcoal, but this leaves only worthless ashes, incapable of imparting warmth; the flame consumes it completely the moment it is exposed to the action of the fire, because this wood is very dry.' 'The fire consumes both ends thereof, and the midst thereof is reduced to ashes.'[3]

Oh! sad but too faithful image of a man, given up to dissipation, and who can be of no advantage to the

[1] Ezech. xv. 3. [2] Ibid. xv. 2. [3] Ibid. xv. 4.

Divine Father of the family. More useless than finger-posts which point out the way, never will he lead back to heaven those who wander therefrom. We have already stated that without the hand of the artisan the most perfect implement is unavailing for labour. Now, it is by recollection, as well as by meditation, that we place ourselves as docile instruments in the hand of God: whoever does not carefully preserve it, therefore, does not lend himself to the operations of the divine will.

Besides, how can you, who live constantly estranged from yourself, presume to aspire to be a worthy co-operator with Jesus Christ in the salvation of souls? 'You are poured out like water,'[1] 'and you shall gather together the dispersed of Juda!'[2] Like another 'Jonas, you fly from the face of the Lord,'[3] 'and you shall assemble the fugitives of Israel!'[4] You follow the dissipation of your thoughts; you do not repent, and yet you are able to inspire others with 'compunction of heart!'[5] No; you 'shall do no good,'[6] because 'you are a man abominable and unprofitable to God.'[7] In the end the angels will cast you into the fire, as the vintagers are wont to abandon to the flames the withered branches they have cut off from the vine.

4. *God punishes it in various other ways.*

It shall burn; behold the fourth chastisement with which a dissipated soul shall be visited. 'Such is the fate of the branch; it either remains attached to the vine or it is cast into the fire.'[8] So is it likewise with the soul; it must either attach itself to God by interior recollection, or else it shall be thrown into the fire, that is, into the

[1] Ps. xxi. 15. [2] Isaias xi. 12. [3] Jonas i. 3. [4] Isaias xi. 12.
[5] Acts ii. 37. [6] Ezech. xv. 5. [7] Job xv. 16. [8] St. Aug. Treat. on S. John.

scorching flames of temptations, afflictions, and finally those of purgatory. If you live in a state of dissipation, it is impossible that you should remain attached to Him, who has said, 'I am the true vine;'[1] therefore you shall burn.

You shall burn with the fire of temptations: vain thoughts, shameful imaginations, irregular desires 'shall run to and fro' in your heart 'like sparks among reeds.'[2] Envy, anger, lust, shall torment you in turn. 'You shall heap' the coals of detraction and calumnies 'on your head.'[3] You shall burn. You shall be cast into a furnace of afflictions.

The bat imprisoned in a house by its imprudence wildly flies backwards and forwards, dashing itself against the walls in every direction, in the vain attempt to escape. In a similar manner is the dissipated soul incessantly wounded, humiliated, lacerated, by the sarcasms, taunts, and reproaches of others, which cast it into an excess of sadness, bitterness, and anguish; it is satiated with gall, where it expected to find the sweetest honey. You shall burn.

Finally, you shall be condemned to long and agonising torments in the flames of purgatory. The intensity, universality, and duration of these torments are terrific; but a soul that will not apply itself to retreat augments and aggravates them beyond conception. Owing to the neglect of a guard over the senses, its daily actions only tend to fan the intensity of this fire. It shall burn; nor shall it be liberated from these flames till it has paid the last farthing.

Behold, then, the four kinds of evils, which, according to the oracle of the Saviour, shall infallibly befall a dissipated soul.

[1] John xv. 1. [2] Wisd. iii. 7. [3] Prov. xxv. 22.

O God, whose immensity has no bounds! 'In whom we live, move, and be;'[1] Thou art constantly present in me by Thy nature, Thy power, Thy wisdom, and Thy providence; 'Thou considerest all the steps of men,'[2] 'to render to every one according to his works.'[3] This I firmly believe, and I adore Thee in my heart, where Thou continually residest.

Alas! Thou rememberest me at all moments with the tenderest affection, and I live entire days and months oblivious of Thy presence, and solely occupied with trifles. 'Thou hast loved me with an everlasting love.'[4] 'Thou hast been mindful of me,'[5] 'to do well by me,'[6] and 'I have forgotten Thee days without number.'[7] 'I have done evil in Thy eyes.'[8] I have lived as though Thou hadst no existence, as if Thou wert blind and deaf, and withdrawn to a distance from me. Oh, monstrous ingratitude!

Henceforth, 'if I forget Thee, let my right hand be forgotten,' and let my 'tongue cleave to my jaws, if I do not remember Thee.'[9] I shall, at least, consecrate the remainder of my life to thinking of and loving Thee. 'Who shall give me to find Thee'[10] alone in the solitude of my heart, O my Beloved? When shall I take up my abode with Thee 'in the beauty of peace, and in the tabernacles of confidence, and in perfect rest;'[11] where no one can disturb me more? 'May my life be hidden in Thee,'[12] until Thou admit me 'to partake of the saints'[13] in the Eternal City, where the soul who has taken refuge in the interior 'wilderness shall at length be glad and rejoice.'[14]

[1] Acts xvii. 28. [2] Job xxxiv. 21. [3] Matt. xvi. 27. [4] Jerem. xxxi. 3.
[5] Ps. cxiii. 12. [6] Gen. xxxii. 12. [7] Jerem. ii. 32. [8] 1 Kings xv. 19.
[9] Ps. cxxxvi. 5. [10] Cant. viii. 1. [11] Isaias xxxii. 18. [12] Colos. iii. 3.
[13] Ibid. i. 12. [14] Isaias xxxv. 1.

Article III.

Of the means of acquiring interior recollection.

We may now confidently repeat that interior recollection is a treasure, for the acquisition of which no sacrifice should be spared.

It is a paradise of delights. Our soul has, without doubt, frequently experienced the necessity of uniting itself with God alone, by taking up its abode in this holy solitude; but as the Royal Prophet demanded 'the wings of the dove, that he might fly away and be at rest,'[1] so we also should rise superior to ourselves. We should assume spiritual wings, that is, the means of acquiring interior recollection, to fly off to the solitude of the heart.

These means, at least the most powerful of them, are: the observance of silence, the habit of which is chiefly acquired by remaining in our room, the flight of over-dissipating occupations, and the frequent exercise of the presence of God.

1. *Of the observance of silence and fidelity in remaining in our room.*

The first means of acquiring interior recollection is the habit of silence, acquired by an undeviating fidelity in remaining in our room. Between these two practices there exists an intimate connection: they are sisters in some sort, which lend each other mutual support. We shall not, therefore, separate them here; we shall, on the contrary, place them both in the front rank of the means adapted to the acquisition of interior recollection: they

[1] Ps. liv. 7.

are, besides, so necessary for this end, that without their aid in vain should we aspire to reach it; for recollection is a rare grace, 'which will not enter a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins.'[1] Loquacity and dissipation, on the contrary, are, according to the Holy Ghost, an exhaustless source of faults; 'in a multitude of words there shall not want sin,'[2] because it is then that man pours himself out on creatures, and thus becomes incapable of receiving the grace of recollection.

But besides, even though the Almighty should, by a pure effect of His bounty, have already granted us this most delicate virtue, how can we preserve it, unaided by Him? It is true, then, that intemperance of the tongue is incompatible with the precious advantages of interior solitude.

The practice of interior recollection requires on man's part purity of heart, the spirit of prayer, the habit of ejaculatory prayer, a kind of predisposition and attraction for solitude. It demands that his soul, avaricious of heavenly things, should love to abide within itself, and separate itself from the bustle and turmoil of creatures; but never, assuredly, shall we unite all these conditions without the observance of silence and assiduity in remaining in our room. This is a truth which the authority of the saints and daily experience testify.

A religious who frequently leaves his cell, who goes through the house, frequents public-places, stops everyone he meets, in order to hold long, useless conversations, resembles a vase of perfume devoid of its cover, the odour of which quickly evaporates.

He cannot preserve either delicacy of conscience, or fervour, or repose or attention to the presence of God,

[1] Wisd. i. 4. [2] Prov. x. 19.

because his imagination amuses itself with frivolities, his mind expands itself on vain thoughts, while the tumult of the passions fatigues his will, and tepidity and indifference take possession of his soul, inflicting thereon innumerable wounds. Never shall that heart be the depository of the rich and inestimable treasure of recollection; this precious grace, therefore, is irretrievably lost by whoever neglects to observe solitude and silence. 'He who aims at inward and spiritual things must, with Jesus Christ, turn aside from the crowd; because a devout soul becomes more familiar with her Creator the farther she dwelleth from all the tumult of the world.'[1] No; in no place does the lily of justice grow more luxuriantly or shine more resplendently than in the solitude of the soul. 'It is easier to keep silence altogether than not to fall into excess in speaking; to keep retired at home than to be sufficiently upon one's guard abroad; and we seldom return to silence without some wound to conscience.'[2] Generally speaking, the soul takes away with it, from its conversations with men, only dissipation of mind, the stain of sin, uneasiness, remorse, sadness, weariness, and vain thoughts, all of which are so many obstacles and preventatives to interior recollection. The dissipated, facetious, talkative man is on the high road to grave faults. Without silence,' says Albert the Great, 'a man is easily conquered by his adversary.' Solomon teaches us the same in the following comparison: 'A man that cannot refrain his own spirit in speaking is as a city that lieth open, and is not compassed with walls,'[3] which offers no opposition to the enemy; he shall be easily vanquished by the devil.

[1] Imit. b. i. ch. 20. [2] Ibid. [3] Prov. xxv. 28.

St. Gregory explains the steps by which dissipation usually leads us into sin. 'We commence,' says he, 'by useless words, idle words succeed; they, in turn, are superseded by buffooneries, then follow lies, then angry words, and finally scandalous expressions: in a word, we commence by little things and end by great ones.' Behold into what faults dissipation precipitates us: and how can we imagine there could be any connection between interior recollection, which is a fruit of heavenly origin, and such monstrous faults? No; once again, without solitude and silence never shall we acquire the habit of recollection.

The Sulamitess herself did not find her Beloved so long as she sought Him 'in the streets and broad ways of the city.' She was not permitted to enjoy the sweetness of His conversations till she had returned 'to her Mother's house, and into the chamber of her that bore her.'[1]

Behold the reason why 'the greatest saints avoided the company of men as much as they could, and chose to live alone with God in secret,'[2] being fully persuaded that it is not in society and the bustle of human conversation that they can hear the light whisper of the Spirit of God and find the way of perfection. 'David became like a sparrow all alone; like a night raven in the house, like to a pelican of the wilderness, because he feared,' lest being too much engrossed with exterior things, 'his heart should wither as grass'[3] mown by the scythe.

Jesus Christ, to teach His disciples a love of solitude and silence, makes them interrupt their apostolic functions. He separates them for a time from the society of men and 'leads them into a desert place.'[4] God requires

[1] Cant. iii. 2, 4. [2] Imit. b. i. ch. 20. [3] Ps. ci. 7. [4] Mark vi. 31.

that Moses should keep silence and withdraw from the people; it is only in 'the darkness of a cloud from the depth of the Ark of the Covenant'[1] that He intimates His will and reveals His secrets to him.

The Spouse, the moment the voice of her Beloved falls upon her ear, is silent, and hides herself, 'like the dove in the clifts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall;'[2] she knows that it 'is while all things are in quiet silence that the Almighty Word leaped down from heaven from His royal throne.'[3]

Silence and solitude are, therefore, the two sacred wings with which we may soar to the pinnacle of perfection, the two channels by which the Source of all blessings dispenses to us His graces. If we do not observe silence, if we do not remain in our room, never shall we obtain interior recollection or attain to sanctity; our soul will not enter into communication with the Holy Spirit, it will not make any progress in virtue. Such is the meaning of the reproach addressed to Job: 'Shall a man full of talk be justified?'[4] 'No,' here replies St. Gregory the Great, 'the man abounding in words shall never rise to the perfection of justice. He who knows how to bridle his tongue preserves himself irreprehensible in his words, 'and if any man offend not in word,' says St. James, 'the same is a perfect man:'[5] so powerful a means of advancing in perfection is this holy and salutary custom of moderating our speech and observing interior recollection.

Let us examine ourselves: have we, according to the advice of Ecclesiasticus, 'made a just bridle for our mouth?'[6] Are we wont to remain in our room? Do we

[1] Exod. xix. 9. [2] Cant. ii. 14. [3] Wisd. xviii. 14.
[4] Job xi. 2. [5] James iii. 2. [6] Eccli. xxviii. 29.

imitate the dove despatched by Noah from the ark? She did not forget the retreat that had sheltered her, but eagerly returned there to seek for rest. Do we not rather resemble the voracious raven which remained hovering and croaking over the dead bodies, and whose return was vainly waited for?

Do we obey the admonition of the apostle, and 'avoid foolish and old wives' fables?'[1] Do we await the coming of the Holy Ghost retired in our cell, as the apostles awaited Him shut up in the supper-room? Are we not of the number of those so well characterised by St. Paul as 'idlers, tattlers, busy-bodies, speaking things which they ought not, and who learn to go about from house to house?'[2]

Should we recognise in ourselves any of these defects, let us promptly correct them and make a firm resolution never to leave our room except when necessity, charity, or obedience makes it a duty to do so. When we leave it through any of these motives, let us, before doing so, raise our hearts to God, implore His grace to avoid what may have formerly been occasions of sin to us, as well as such as may present themselves in the occupations to which duty calls us.

'Let us hedge in our ears with thorns,'[3] that is, according to the interpretation of St. Gregory Nazianzen, 'let us shut them against evil discourse and vain conversations.' 'Not only have we to beware lest our tongue speak evil,' says St. Bernard, 'we must also be on our guard lest the tongue of another teach us to speak evil,' and fill our mind with vain thoughts; 'let us not hear a wicked tongue,'[4] as a man would do who is foolishly eager for news and public reports.

[1] 1 Tim. iv. 7. [2] 1 Tim. v. 13. [3] Eccli. xxviii. 28. [4] Ibid.

Let us, with the Royal Prophet, 'turn away our eyes that they may not behold vanity;'[1] let us not be in the house as a steward, who is obliged to take note of all that occurs there, but let us apply to ourselves the words of Jesus Christ to St. Peter: 'What is it to thee? for thy part follow me;'[2] let us imitate David, who 'as a deaf man heard not: and as a dumb man opened not his mouth.'[3]

We can say nothing more effective on this subject than these words of the 'Imitation': 'Son, in many things it behoveth thee to be ignorant and esteem thyself one dead upon earth, and as one to whom the whole world is crucified. Many things also must thou pass by with a deaf ear, as it is more profitable to turn away thy eyes from such things as displease thee.'[4] If we observe these wise counsels, if, when we are obliged to go out, we are docile to the guidance of our good angel, we shall return not only free from stain, but with an increase of merit.

In our conversations let us follow the advice of Holy Writ, and place 'a door to our mouth.'[5] The door of a house is neither always open nor always closed; but is opened or closed according to the weather or to the persons who seek admission; we open it to our friends and close it against our enemies. It is thus we should act as regards ourselves, by opening the door of our mouth to pious, prudent, useful words, and closing it against evil and perverse ones: but as the door of our mouth turns with a marvellous facility, let us take wise precautions to guard against a surprise.

The first rule to be observed regards the time in which

[1] Ps. cxviii. 37. [2] John xxi. 22. [3] Ps. xxxvii. 14.
[4] Imit. b. iii. ch. 4 [5] Eccli. xxviii. 28.

we should speak; for 'there is a time to be silent and a time to speak,'[1] says Solomon. To be able to discern this moment is great wisdom, and to conform our conduct to it is great prudence; it is even, according to the testimony of the Holy Ghost, the mark which distinguishes the wise man from the fool. 'A wise man will hold his peace till he see' a suitable 'opportunity:' but a 'babbler and a fool will regard no time.'[2] 'To speak a word in due time is like apples on beds of silver;'[3] 'but a parable spoken out of due season shall be rejected.'[4] How important it is, therefore, to discern and avail ourselves of the proper moment for speaking.

1. Let us beware of speaking when we ought to keep silence, because without grace it would be impossible to speak well, and we have no right to expect God to assist us in our words at a time that He orders us to keep silence.

2. Let us not speak before the proper time, according to this maxim of Ecclesiasticus: 'Before thou hear answer not a word, and interrupt not others in the midst of their discourse;'[5] for 'he that answereth before he heareth, showeth himself to be a fool and worthy of confusion.'[6]

3. Let us not speak longer than is necessary. Let not our mouth be as a pierced vase, which allows all the liquor it contains to escape and be lost: all that our mind contains of good would likewise be lost in the air with our words.

A recollected soul will understand how to keep silence under these three circumstances, and shall be replenished with peace. Of this the Holy Ghost has given us

[1] Eccli. xx. 6. [2] Ibid. xx. 7. [3] Prov. xxv. 11.
[4] Eccli. xx. 22. [5] Ibid. xi. 8. [6] Prov. xviii. 13.

a formal promise: 'He that keepeth his mouth and his tongue, keepeth his soul from distress.'[1]

The second rule refers to the 'subject' of our discourse. The apostle teaches us our obligations in this respect in his Epistle to the Ephesians: 'Let no evil speech proceed from your mouth, but that which is good to the edification of the faith.'[2] St. Peter gives us a similar admonition: 'If any man speak, let him speak as the words of God.'[3]

It suffices not, then, 'that old matters depart from our mouth;'[4] that is, according to the interpretation of the Fathers, it is not enough to abstain from haughty, harsh, offensive, sinful, and scandalous words; but our conversations, after the example of the apostles, must be replete with God and heavenly things, and animated with such fervour that it will be true to say: 'from our mouth came a two-edged sword,'[5] a type of the love and religious fear with which our words should penetrate the hearts of our hearers.

The third rule teaches us the manner in which we should speak, which consists in discretion. 'To speak with discretion,' says Peter of Blois, 'is to speak when necessity or utility requires it. It is to speak beseemingly of God, of our neighbour, and of ourselves: of ourselves with humility and modesty; of our neighbour with edification, and of God in praise.' St. Basil desires that even in our recreations our conversations should be seasoned with the salt of evangelical wisdom, that it be always becoming, spiritual, and rational.

Following the wise maxim of a philosopher: either let us keep silence, or say things which are of more

[1] Prov. xxi. 23. [2] Ephes. iv. 29. [3] 1 Pet. iv. 11.
[4] 1 Kings ii. 3. [5] Apoc. i. 16.

value than silence: let circumspection rule, and prudence characterise all our conversations. 'But in order to this,' says St. Jerome, 'we must weigh well what we are going to say, for the word we utter is as a stone just launched forth: neither the one nor the other can be recalled.' 'A word once spoken never returns.' How prudent, therefore, is the advice of St. Bernard to submit our words twice to the test before once giving them expression.

'Let us be prompt to listen and slow to speak.'[1] According to that beautiful comparison of St. Bonaventure, we should be as avaricious of our words as the miser is of his gold; we should be as reluctant to open our mouth as he is to open his purse.

How have we kept all these rules, and how do we intend to keep them in future? If we are wise let us make 'a balance for our words,'[2] and weigh before speaking them. If we have the acquisition of recollection at heart, let us fly, let us conceal ourselves, let us keep silence like Arsenius, because silence and assiduity in remaining in our room are a most efficacious means for obtaining this virtue. 'Oh, who will set a guard before my mouth, and a sure seal upon my lips, that my tongue destroy me not;'[3] 'who will allure me into solitude, that the Lord may nourish me with the milk of His consolation, and that He may speak to my heart?'

2. *The flight of dissipating occupations.*

But the exact observance of silence does not of itself suffice for the acquisition of recollection: to obtain this virtue another no less efficacious and necessary means is needed, viz., the flight of over-dissipating occupations.

[1] Horat. Epist. xix. b. i. [2] Eccli. xxviii. 29. [3] Eccli. xxii. 23.

'Of what avails *exterior* without *interior* solitude?' asks St. Gregory. 'Of what use,' adds Seneca, is a complete 'separation from the world, if your heart be stupefied by the noise of its passions?' Such a retreat would only be that of a convict in the galleys, or of the inmate of a prison.

In vain, therefore, do you shut yourself up all day in your room, and observe silence more strictly than a disciple of Pythagoras, if the mind, engrossed with business, is unable to find a moment to bestow a thought on eternity, and is so much the slave of its occupations as to have no leisure to think either of God or of itself.

The distractions with which our life abounds, and which keep our soul exiled from itself, proceed from three sources: 1, The multiplicity of our occupations; 2, an immoderate eagerness to finish them; 3, our anxiety concerning their success. These are so many invincible obstacles to recollection, because the first oppresses the mind, the second dissipates it, and the third injures its peace.

First.—Multiplicity of occupation is an obstacle to interior recollection, which is as common as it is irrational in its motive. In effect, a great number of officious persons are to be found, who aspire to exercise a sort of universal agency, a directing influence, and who consider themselves as the mainspring of every enterprise. There is nothing with which they do not busy themselves, especially if any honour or advantage is likely to accrue to them therefrom. It is neither charity nor zeal, nor a spirit of industry, which actuates them; it is pride, presumption, contempt for the lights of others. They obey an insatiable craving to reserve to themselves a monopoly of the praise and the approbation of others.

'Vain man,' says the Scripture, 'meddle not with many matters.'[1] It is better to do little and to do it well than to do a great deal and to do it badly. The Spouse of the Canticles acknowledges that she had cause to regret having interfered in the business of others. 'The sons of my mother have made me the keeper in the vineyards: my vineyard I have not kept.'[2] Moses did not consider it possible to exercise the cares of government unaided, but, listening to the advice of Jethro, he delegated to him the greater part of the business. We certainly are not more diligent than the Sulamitess, nor more prudent than the legislator of the people of God. Let us, at least, imitate them, and see, by a serious examination, whether there be not some superfluous occupations of which we should rid ourselves.

Let us resign by preference those which bring us most into contact with the world. 'No man being a soldier of God,' says the apostle, 'entangleth himself with secular business.'[3] Let us choose the kind of work to which obedience or reason obliges us, remembering this exhortation of St. Paul to the first Christians: 'We entreat you, that you do your own business,'[4] the business of your perfection, the most excellent as it is the most important of all others, since all others compared with it are useless and but childish amusements.

Secondly.—In accomplishing what is strictly our duty, we must avoid acting with immoderate impetuosity and eagerness. Some give themselves up with so much ardour to whatever is prescribed for them or which pleases them, that it seems as though, like new Atlases, they have to bear up the heavens: they would wish to terminate an affair with one stroke; but so absorbed are

[1] Eccli. xi. 10. [2] Cant. i. 5. [3] 2 Tim. ii. 4. [4] 1 Thess. iv. 11.

they in it, that they disappear as in an abyss: they identify themselves to such a degree with whatever occupies them, that they become, as it were, the personification of it, and are in some sort all study, music, reading, etc.

It would be impossible to express how detrimental such a fault is: it stifles the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, spoils the purity of the intention, disturbs the peace of the soul, resists grace, robs our actions of their merit and dignity, or, at least, materially diminishes the value of them. 'Substance got in haste shall be diminished, but that which by little and little is gathered with the hand shall increase.'[1] But as such eagerness causes us to live in complete forgetfulness of God, we may affirm that of all its effects the most deplorable is the impossibility of practising interior recollection to which it reduces it.

The pious desires of an over-impetuous man, his good resolutions formed during meditation, vanish 'as dust that is driven with the whirlwind, and as smoke'[2] which disappears in the air. When at the close of life this 'man of riches' shall resign his laborious task to enter into the repose of eternity, enlightened 'by the light from the everlasting hills, he finds nothing in his hands but chaff,'[3] of which the Divine Justice will take possession to deliver it up to the flames, 'when the Father of the family shall purge His floor.'[4]

The following are some means of preventing this precipitation in our actions:

1. Before commencing any action, let us propose to ourselves to devote to it, at least for this once, the proper time for doing it, imagining to ourselves that, like Esdras, we hear the voice of our angel guardian: 'Do not hurry.'

[1] Prov. xiii. 11. [2] Osee xiii. 4. [3] Ps. lxxv. 5. [4] Luke iii. 17.

2. If during the action we perceive that our impetuosity is carrying us away, let us pause, raise our eyes to heaven, and renew our intention and good resolution.

3. But if, notwithstanding this vigilance, we fail to succeed in repressing and moderating our eagerness, let us cease our work for a moment, interrupting, at least for a few minutes, the occupation which is carrying us away. This trifling loss of time is not to be regretted, since the sacrifice we make of it shall be rewarded by an increase of merits.

Nothing is gained by over-haste. This is an oracle of Ecclesiasticus: 'The man that laboureth and maketh haste is so much the more in want.'[1] What is done precipitately is never well done. Counsel can only be found in a judicious tardiness, and 'they that do all things with counsel,' says Solomon, 'are ruled by wisdom.'[2] 'The valiant woman' is eulogised in Scripture, simply because 'Counsel presideth over the work of her hands;' that is to say, because she acted with a moderate, prudent, tranquil, and wisely-regulated attention. Let us imitate her, if we desire to merit the same encomiums before God, and to live in peace in the holy solitude of our heart.

Thirdly.—The third obstacle to recollection is an anxious preoccupation concerning the success of our enterprises. Nothing draws us more away from ourselves than this anxiety, consequently there is nothing more opposed to recollection. Those cares, this uneasiness concerning the issue of our affairs, are the thorns of which our Saviour speaks, which smother the good seed, that is to say, holy inspirations; they are 'a burning wind, which dries up the fruit'[3] of our labour, and spoils

[1] Eccli. xi. 11. [2] Prov. xiii. 10. [3] Ezech. xix. 12.

all the merit of our actions. Nevertheless, this defect is so common, even amongst pious people, that they also have often reason to cry out with Antiochus: 'Sleep is gone from our eyes, we are fallen away, and our heart is cast down for anxiety.'[1]

It was to teach us how displeasing such preoccupation is to God that our Divine Lord rebuked the sister of Lazarus: 'Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and art troubled about many things.'[2] This faithful soul had to undergo such a correction, despite the purity of her motives, the sanctity of her action, and the exigency of the moment: and yet these are the pretexts we usually allege to justify our disquietudes.

We persuade ourselves that it is for the interests of God and our neighbour that we are solicitous; but the moment we enter seriously into ourselves, and that a ray of divine grace penetrating our heart shows it to us as it really is, then we perceive that it is not the glory of God but our own, not the honour of our state, but our own honour, not the judgment of heaven, but the opinion of men, that causes all our uneasiness and perplexities. Besides, whatever may be the source of our anxiety, we should listen with docility to Jesus Christ, who forbids 'solicitude,'[3] because 'God will provide all,'[4] and will dispose all things wisely for our greater good.

1. Let us free our hearts, therefore, from those cares and fears, and, with Mary, let us choose the better part, by casting ourselves unreservedly into the bosom of Divine Providence. Let us fortify ourselves in a perfect indifference concerning the success of our labours, 'and cast all our care on God, for He hath care of us.'[5] He is

[1] 1 Machab. vi. 10. [2] Luke x. 41. [3] Matt. vi. 34.
[4] Gen. xxii. 8. [5] 1 Peter v. 7.

omnipotent; He sees all; He loves us with an infinite love; He is able therefore, He knows the business in which we are now engaged, and He desires to co-operate with us, that we may accomplish it for His greater glory and our salvation, which should always be the great and sole motive of everything we do. Another great incentive to our discarding all uneasiness is the remembrance that the Almighty only demands our labour and efforts, without requiring success or fruits.

2. One of the most ordinary causes of our preoccupation is human respect, that pusillanimous and culpable fear of the judgments of men. But we have already pointed out the means of combating this unhappy weakness in the first part of this work (Chap. V., Art. IV.).

We now know the three great obstacles to interior recollection, which are multiplicity of business, an immoderate desire to finish them, and the anxiety we feel regarding their success: let us follow faithfully the advice just given us, for conquering these difficulties, and our occupations, instead of injuring our interior solitude, will increase and enhance its merit.

3. *The frequent exercise of the presence of God.*

Behold the last and principal means of acquiring recollection. To understand its excellence and necessity, it suffices to say that this holy exercise is nothing else but a constant view of faith, an unalterable love, which absorbs us in the thought of the presence of God; and as interior recollection is itself a constant and affectionate attention to the divine presence within us, it is evident that the shortest road to the acquisition of this recollection is frequently to call to mind that God has chosen our soul for His abode.

This holy exercise of the divine presence, by the mere fact that it consists in the knowledge and love of God, is so exalted that the Cherubim possess not and know not any more noble employment. It is the sole occupation of the blessed and of Jesus Christ, the Head of the elect. What do I say? the most holy Trinity, who 'inhabiteth light inaccessible,'[1] is altogether occupied in contemplating and loving itself from eternity, and such shall likewise be its one great occupation for everlasting ages. Why, then, should men refuse to begin here below, what it will be so glorious to them to continue for ever in heaven?

What a shame! We confess that we are completely penetrated, enveloped, and animated by the divine essence, as water penetrates a sponge, as air encompasses the earth, as the soul animates the body. We believe that the 'ear of this jealous God heareth all things;'[2] that 'His' eye 'seeth all things.'[3] We know that 'He is the Lord who searches the heart and proves the reins: who gives to everyone according to his way, and according to the fruit of his devices;'[4] and we live as indifferent to His presence as if 'the clouds were His covert and He did not consider our things: as if He judged through a mist, as if this Omnipotent Being could do nothing to us.'[5] O heavens! 'God is a witness of our reins, a true searcher of our heart, and a hearer of our tongue.'[6] He is present and beholds me; with me and governs me; in me and animates me; He hears, feels, speaks, acts with me; He is always labouring for me; He is constantly thinking of me; he is loving me incessantly with a boundless love; and I, vile worm that I am, spend

[1] 1 Tim. vi. 16. [2] Wisd. i. 10. [3] Eccli. xxiii. 27.
[4] Jerem. xvii. 10. [5] Job xxii. 13. [6] Wisd. i. 6.

nearly my whole life in forgetfulness of His infinite Majesty, and I recall His presence only to offend Him!

Lord, 'whose eyes look into the hearts of men, into the most hidden parts,'[1] is it then possible that I treat Thee as if Thou wert my personal enemy, that I do not even condescend to look at Thee, though Thou art not only constantly close to, but intimately present to me? How, then, do I dare to refuse Thee the proofs of love, which are due to Thee, whilst I squander them on worthless creatures?

O, my soul! thou art the temple wherein God resides, thou art the throne whereon He reposes, and thou ungratefully tirest of His company; thou abandonest Him to seek creatures. Thy memory ought to be another Ark of the Covenant, in which the august image of thy Creator should be preserved intact, and it is but the receptacle of illusions and vain, deceitful imaginations. Thy understanding should be shining as the Golden Candlestick, and brilliant with heavenly fire, fed and preserved by holy thoughts, and it is involved in darkness and forgetfulness of its God. The will should be a living altar, sanctified by the holocaust of holy affections, to burn with the pure flames of divine love; but it is benumbed with spiritual torpor, or if it possess any ardour, it is only in the pursuit of its irregular inclinations. 'Who hath ever heard such a thing, and who hath seen the like to this?'[2] 'The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel hath not known Me.'[3] 'Thou alone, O faithless soul! hast forgotten God thy Saviour and thy strong helper;'[4] tremble, lest in turn His mercy forget and His justice alone remember thee.

Let us take prompt measures against so terrible a mis-

[1] Eccli. xxiii. 28. [2] Isaias lxvi. 8. [3] Ibid. i. 3. [4] Ibid. xvii. 10.

fortune; let 'us have God in our mind all the days of our life.'[1] 'Let us muse on Him in all our ways, and He will direct our steps.'[2] Why should we be unmindful of Him? 'At all moments we are loaded with His benefits, and the recipients of His favours; consequently, at no time should we be forgetful of His presence.'[3]

From these reasonings of St. Ambrose, St. Gregory concludes 'that man should remember God oftener than he breathes;' and lastly, St. Bernard tells us that in all our thoughts and actions we should recall God's presence, and regard all such time as lost in which we fail to remember our Divine Master. For our part, let us resolve to conform our life to what so legitimate a conclusion demands.

The two means of succeeding are: To make each day frequent acts of faith in the presence of God within us. I say acts of faith, for it is better to believe simply in the Divine Presence than to represent the Eternal and Invisible Being under sensible forms, such as a triangle, an eye which beholds all things, etc. Neither do I deem it advisable to represent our Lord Jesus Christ close to or in us: now under the features of a young child, now under the appearance of a man in the perfection of age, now suffering, now glorious. These efforts of the imagination might fatigue our mind, weaken our strength, and prejudice the discharge of our duties.

Such fictions may even be dangerous and subject to illusion, particularly in beginners, who have as yet but little experience in the ways of God; above all, they are contrary to truth, for God being a pure spirit, the Divinity cannot be represented under any corporeal or sensible object; and if it is true that Jesus Christ, the

[1] Job iv. 6. [2] Prov. iii. 6.
[3] St. Amb. Of the dignity of human nature.

author of actual and habitual grace, and even of all the blessings we receive, lives in us, as the cause exists in its effects, it is likewise certain that it is only in the Blessed Eucharist that He abides here below, really present in body and soul.

Let us be satisfied with believing simply, with a humble and docile submission of mind, this truth of faith, that the Divinity is intimately present to us, that it fills, pervades, and encompasses our whole existence, according to these words of the apostle, 'in Him we live, move, and have our being.'[1] The conjuring up of fallacious images is a laborious and useless task. A pure and simple adhesion of our understanding to the thought of this Sovereign Being residing and acting in us, as revelation and reason itself teach us, is more beneficial.

This act of faith must be made by us with all the affection of a friend speaking to a friend who is present, but whom the darkness of night hides from view.

2. The holy and salutary exercise of the presence of God does not confine itself to a purely speculative faith, but consists of an interior act, which tends to unite us closely to our Sovereign Good. The 'devils' also 'believe' in the immensity of God and His supreme dominion over all things, 'and they tremble;'[2] but, in consequence of not loving Him, their belief is unavailing.

It is essential, therefore, not only that our mind firmly believe in the presence of the King of kings within us, but also that our will love Him ardently, and testify that love by short, fervent, and frequent ejaculatory prayers, such as the following: 'My Beloved to me and I to Him. What have I in heaven, and what do I desire upon earth beside Him? Lord, what wilt Thou have me

[1] Acts xvii. 28. [2] James ii. 19.

to do? let Thy will be done and not mine;' or by other similar affections, corresponding to one of the three ways of the spiritual life, and to the wants of our soul.

These holy desires are as 'the hair of the neck of the spouse which hath wounded the heart'[1] of the Divine Bridegroom. They are burning darts, swift arrows, impelled with loving violence, and which, forcing a passage athwart the thick clouds of our weakness, penetrate to the throne of the Divinity, and happily wound the heart of the All-Merciful. The habit of these acts merits and obtains for us that spirit of perpetual prayer which the Saviour inculcates: 'You ought always to pray and not to faint.'[2] This constant and loving remembrance of the Divinity is in itself an excellent prayer, since nothing is more calculated to purify our heart from every stain.

Let us, then, familiarise ourselves with the practice of ejaculatory prayer, and 'our conversation shall be in heaven.'[3] 'We shall be fellow-citizens with the saints and domestics of God.'[4] We shall be associated to the number of the elect, who unceasingly 'see the face of the Lord,' and who bear 'His name on their foreheads.'[5] Mysterious words, which interpreters explain as the remembrance of the Divinity, and the constant exercise of God's presence.

There are numbers of books, which contain models of these pious affections, and I have myself collected several examples of this kind in another of my works.[6]

In order to render them effective, we must observe the following advice: 1. They must be short, springing from the heart rather than the mind, and the offerings of real fervour, not of strained application. The best and

[1] Cant. iv. 9. [2] Luke xviii. 1. [3] Philip. iii. 20. [4] Ephes. ii. 20.
[5] Apoc. xxii. 4. [6] This work is entitled 'Christianus Pie Moriens.'

most efficacious are those burning aspirations which the heart, touched by grace, draws from its own depths, and which it expresses in simple, unstudied words.

2. They must neither be too multiplied nor varied, otherwise they would absorb or at least distract the soul.

One or two frequently and fervently reiterated suffice to obtain all that we ask; for which reason it is very useful to refer them to our particular examen, or the resolution we have taken in meditation.

3. We ought to address them to God, not as seated on an inaccessible throne, but as close to us, nay, abiding in the very centre of our heart.

Let us pay assiduous attention to this holy practice of walking constantly in the presence of God, and we shall attain perfection in a very short time, for 'it teacheth temperance, and prudence, and justice, and fortitude, which are such things as men can have nothing more profitable in life.'[1]

'Let us look well to the paths of our house,'[2] and examine whether we have observed this advice. We must make a firm resolution to follow it faithfully henceforward; and to avoid negligence on this point we must be fully convinced, not merely of its utility, but its absolute necessity for the acquisition of solid virtue; for, as St. Laurence Justinian writes, 'a soul desirous to run in the way of perfection must live continually in the presence and intimate familiarity of God.'

From all that has been said in this chapter, it is evident that the observance of silence, the habit of which is acquired by assiduously remaining in our room, triumphs over the exterior obstacles to recollection; that the flight of over-dissipating occupations breaks down the interior

[1] Wisd. viii. 7. [2] Prov. xxxi. 27.

obstacles, and that the exercise of the presence of God ennobles the sentiments of the soul, unites it closely to the heavenly Spouse by the bond of charity, and enriches it with the plenitude of gifts, which spiritual solitude procures: consequently, that an undeviating fidelity in the observance of these three means will speedily obtain for us the holy virtue of recollection.

CHAPTER IV.

OF HOLY COMMUNION.

It would be a waste of time to attempt to prove the efficacy of the adorable Eucharist in enabling us to acquire solid virtue. The eloquent silence of the Eternal Word, completely concealed as He is under the sacramental species, sufficiently extols its power. If we fail to experience its happy effects, it is simply because the tepidity with which we usually approach the Holy Table opposes great impediments to our doing so. It is all-important, therefore, that we should understand the pressing motives which urge us to communicate with fervour. They are the excellence and effects of the adorable Eucharist, the love which Jesus Christ manifests in this adorable mystery, the dignity of the Holy Sacrifice and of the Christian priesthood. We shall terminate a matter of such vital import by pointing out the means of participating worthily in this heavenly banquet.

ARTICLE I.

Of the excellence of the Blessed Eucharist.

The excellence of the mystery of the Eucharist is infinite, divine, and incomprehensible, on account: 1, of

the dignity of Him who resides there; 2, of the manner in which He resides there; 3, of the end for which He resides there.

1. *The dignity of Him who is concealed in this mystery.*

It is the body of the Saviour, born of the Virgin Mary, torn in the scourging, pierced with a lance, crowned with thorns, cruelly nailed and hanging for three hours on an infamous gibbet, and finally dead there for our salvation. It is this same body that remains concealed under the mystic shades of this adorable Sacrament. It is there that the adorable Soul of Jesus Christ dwells, in all the perfection of its virtues, hypostatically united to the Word, and participating by this ineffable union in the infinite power of the Father, the wisdom of the Son, and the goodness of the Holy Ghost.

In a word, He is there present, 'at whose name every knee should bow in heaven, on earth, and under the earth;'[1] a God-man, to whom 'all power has been given in heaven and in earth;'[2] Jesus Christ, the happiness of the elect, the terror of the demons, the 'LORD OF LORDS,'[3] 'the Saviour of the world,'[4] 'the brightness of God's glory, and the figure of His substance,'[5] 'the Judge of the living and the dead;'[6] it is there, in fine, that the Eternal God, the Divinity itself, abides by the august presence of the three persons of the invisible Trinity.

2. *The manner in which Jesus Christ dwells in the Eucharist.*

He dwells there not attired in royal magnificence, and in the splendour of the saints,'[7] but veiled under weak species and under the appearance of a morsel of

[1] Philip. ii. 10. [2] Matt. xxviii. 18. [3] Apoc. xix. 16. [4] John iv. 42. [5] Heb. i. 3. [6] Acts x. 42. [7] Ps. viii. 10.

bread, to be eaten as ordinary food. He subjects Himself, so to speak, to a state of violence, to a constraint which would deprive Him of life were He not immortal, since, in this state He cannot naturally either feel, or speak, or hear, or make any bodily movement. And yet, O ye heavens, be astonished! to reduce Him to such impotence it is not necessary to recur to the strength of the Principalities and Powers of heaven; five words suffice, five words pronounced by a priest, even though he were a sinful one; every time, and in every place, this priest pronounces them in accordance with the regulations of the Church, Jesus Christ obeys the summons. Thus humbled, He remains under the sacred species until they are consumed, and sometimes even till they are destroyed and decomposed; there He is, exposed to the injuries, the blasphemies, the sacrilegious outrages of Jews, infidels, heretics, and the impious of all denominations.

3. *The end for which He remains concealed.*

Oh, mystery worthy of the admiration of angels! mystery, whose excellence is infinitely enhanced by the end which 'the King of glory'[1] proposes to Himself in reducing Himself to so abject a condition. In effect, this omnipotent God who stands in need of no one, conceals Himself under the Eucharistic veils, not for His own interests, but for ours, to prove His love for us, and to beg for ours in return; to render us participators in His graces and His kingdom, and to manifest to the entire universe that 'His delights are to be with the children of men.'[2] 'This' truly 'hidden God,'[3] has withdrawn into the sacred obscurity of His Tabernacle to console the afflicted, sustain the tempted, enrich the

[1] Ps. xxiii. 10. [2] Prov. viii. 31. [3] Isaias xlv. 15.

indigent, protect the unfortunate, heal the sick, and load with benefits all those who visit Him.

He withholds the dazzling splendour of His glory, He conceals from us the magnitude of His power, that we may approach Him with perfect confidence. He desires to be a salutary aliment to the living, an efficacious remedy to the sick, a heavenly viaticum to the dying; He wishes 'always living' in a state of victim incessantly 'to make intercession for us,'[1] to deliver Himself up wholly to us and for us, according to our necessities and as far as it is possible. For this Good Shepherd, not content with having once given up His life for His sheep on the altar of the cross, wishes likewise to nourish them continually with His sacred flesh and blood.

My God! we believe in this excess of love, and yet we languish in a degrading tepidity! we requite such matchless tenderness with the darkest ingratitude; and, far from adequately esteeming so incomparable a mystery, we audaciously despise it! Culpable that we are, we know, O great God! that Thou art present on the altar, and yet we sin in every possible way against the respect which is due to Thee! The angels tremble in Thy presence, the Princes of the Heavenly Court humble themselves into the abyss of their nothing, it is we alone, vile insects that we are, who dare to appear before Thy tremendous majesty in an irreverent posture. Thou invitest us to Thy adorable Banquet, but we are desirous only of a perishable food, and receive with disgust the Bread of Angels!

O Jesus! divine God of the Eucharist! which prodigy is the greater, Thy bounty or our malice? Yes, we are more insensible than the brute creation; our heart is

[1] Heb. vii. 25.

harder than the rocks, since Thy benefits are incapable of softening it or elevating our thoughts above the level of our senses. O Divine Sun! veiled under the sacramental species, melt, I implore Thee, this icy heart, and inflame it with the sacred fire of Thy love, that it may be a 'fiery furnace' before Thy Tabernacle whence the incense of fervour may perpetually ascend to Thee.

Article II.

Of the effects of the Eucharist.

A second motive for communicating with fervour is the double but very different effects which the Blessed Eucharist produces according as our souls are well or ill disposed for its reception. 'This sacrament,' says St. Thomas, 'imparts life to the good, and death to the wicked;' in other words, it is a throne of grace for those who participate in it devoutly, and a tribunal of justice for those who approach it with tepidity.

1. *The Holy Eucharist is a throne of grace for pious souls.*

In the Eucharist we receive the infinitely good and merciful God, who has the power and the will to bestow all kinds of blessings upon us: for He loves us with an infinite love, and His Heart yearns to enrich us with His gifts and graces, provided we oppose no obstacles to His doing so.

Hence it is that the Fathers of the Church affirm that one single communion, made with the requisite dispositions, would suffice on the spot to transform a sinner, however steeped in crime, into a saint. For, whosoever approaches the Holy Table with true piety, sits down at

the Source of Sanctity, he there receives the very Author of sanctification, and finds, as it were, under his hand, and in their plenitude, all the means necessary for attaining to the perfection of justice. Rejoice then, faithful soul, and indulge in the most magnificent hopes; this God to whom thou openest thy heart is able and willing to render thee holy, and shouldst thou seriously desire it thyself, He will undoubtedly accomplish this design of His love.

Who could prevent His doing so? If 'a coal which one of the Seraphim had taken off the altar'[1] could, in touching the lips of Isaias, purify him from all his iniquities and sins; if the hem of Christ's garment healed an inveterate disease; if the shadow of St. Peter walking through the streets of Jerusalem restored health to the sick, what cannot He who is the Lord of life effect in thee when thou hast received Him? 'He who is salvation and power'[2] itself, the great Physician come down from Heaven to 'heal the sick,'[3] 'to sanctify us by His own Blood,'[4] and purify our souls from their least stains? The Royal Prophet teaches us that we become 'holy' by 'living in intimacy with one who is holy;'[5] shall he then be less favoured who not only penetrates into the Holy of Holies, but who, more favoured than Zacheus, receives and entertains the Holy of Holies Himself, and this not only in His house, but in his own heart?

Jesus Christ brings us in the Eucharist the most exuberant gifts: He offers us His exhaustless largesses, and urges us to accept them. He desires that we draw thence a copious supply of His most precious graces. Even foreseeing our indifference for so priceless a benefit, and

[1] Isaias vi. 6. [2] Apoc. xii. 10. [3] Ezech. xxxiv. [4] Heb. xiii. 12. [5] Ps. xvii. 26.

desirous of inspiring us with an ardent longing to receive Him, 'He has exhausted,'[1] in this adorable Sacrament, all the treasures of His love, for it is truly in this Mystery that 'the Lord, who is merciful and gracious, hath made a remembrance of His wonderful works in giving Himself for food to them that fear Him.'[2]

This august memorial of the divine omnipotence, as St. Thomas calls it, is not merely the greatest of God's gifts and miracles in our regard, it moreover comprises and is an admirable compendium of them all. When the Almighty assumed human nature, He elevated man to the throne of the Divinity, and admitted him to the bosom of His infinite charity; but here His majesty debases itself to our nothing, His immensity conceals and imprisons itself within the narrow precincts of our heart. In the Incarnation one Man alone was, by an ineffable bond, personally united to the Word: in the Eucharist the Word, by an excess of His love, associates, unites Himself to each one of us by an alliance so noble that, after the hypostatic union, it is impossible to conceive anything more admirable.

Jesus Christ merited for us by each of the actions of His life some particular grace; but here He makes over to us a full proprietorship of the very Source of grace. In the other mysteries and sacraments we receive, as it were, drop by drop the heavenly gifts which flow from them restrictedly; but in this we quaff copious draughts from the limitless ocean of all graces—our soul is inundated and inebriated with them. O God! truly magnificent in Thy dealings with Thy creatures! oh, inestimable treasure of which the angels would envy us the possession were they capable of that passion!

[1] Sess. xiii. 2. [2] Ps. cx. 4.

Who will recount, Lord, all the blessings 'Thou hast provided for poor man?'[1] No, there is no tongue that could express, no mind conceive, what Thou bestowest in this Mystery on those who love Thee! Thou givest to the faithful soul 'the Food of angels; Thou givest it Bread from Heaven, having in it all that is delicious and the sweetness of every taste;'[2] 'Thou inebriatest it with a torrent of delights;'[3] 'Thou bringest it into Thy storerooms,'[4] into the inner sanctuary of a holy familiarity with Thee; Thou contractest with that soul a mysterious alliance; it becomes Thy spouse, Thou art unreservedly its own in all things. Elevated with St. Paul to the third heavens, it hears Thee saying to its heart words 'which it is not granted to man to utter.'[5] 'Thy left hand is under its head,'[6] that is, Thou illuminest its understanding with the clearest light, and 'Thy right hand embraces it' by inflaming its heart with burning love, 'Thy fruit is sweet to its palate,'[7] it frees it from all relish for sensual pleasures. O Heavenly Spouse! truly 'white and ruddy,' white in the shadows of the Host, ruddy in the clouds which conceal Thy adorable Blood. 'How dainty is Thy Food,'[8] 'how goodly and inebriating Thy Chalice.'[9]

'Oh, sacred Banquet, where the soul is replenished with grace, where it receives the pledge of future glory,' according to the promise transmitted to us by the Beloved Disciple, 'He that eateth this Bread shall live for ever.'[10] Yes, 'O God of my salvation,"[11] if I worthily receive this Food, 'Thy mercy will follow me all the days of my life; I will dwell in Thy house unto length of days.'[12]

[1] Ps. lxvii. 11.
[2] Wisd. xvi. 20.
[3] Ps. xxxv. 9.
[4] Cant. i. 3.
[5] 2 Cor. xii. 4.
[6] Cant. ii. 5, 6.
[7] Cant. v. 10.
[8] Gen. xlix. 20.
[9] Ps. xxii. 5.
[10] John vi. 59.
[11] Ps. xxxvii. 23.
[12] Ps. xxii. 6.

'This hope is laid up in my bosom.'[1] Whom should I fear? 'Thou hast prepared a Table before me, against them that afflict me,'[2] and who lay snares for my soul. No, if 'armies in camp should stand together against me, my heart shall not fear.'[3]

If Elias, 'strengthened by' material 'food, walked forty days and forty nights unto Mount Horeb, the mountain of God,'[4] the type and figure of the 'everlasting hills,'[5] how much more easily cannot we, sustained by a divine nutriment, ascend to the summit of the heavenly Jerusalem? If the Paschal Lamb, the symbol of the Eucharistic Lamb, could, by the impress of its blood 'on the door-posts of the houses,'[6] protect the Israelites from the exterminating angel; if a handful of flour mingled by Elisius with pernicious food could avert the danger of death which threatened the children of the prophets, what power shall not this divine drink, this food of life, possess to preserve us from death? Oh! blessed a thousand times be the happy effects which flow so copiously from this ineffable mystery whose source is in a paradise of delights! Having duly pondered each of these characteristics, who can fail to recognise the adorable Eucharist as the throne of grace for pious souls?

2. *The Blessed Eucharist is the tribunal of Justice for the tepid.*

But on the other hand, this adorable Sacrament is for those unhappy souls who communicate with tepidity, a tribunal of inexorable severity, a tribunal rendered still more awful by the respective qualities of the Judge and

[1] Job xix. 27. [2] Ps. xxii. 5. [3] Ps. xxvi. 3.
[4] 3 Kings xix. 8. [5] Gen. xlix. 26. [6] Exod. xii. 7.

of the criminal. 'Who,' cries out St. John, 'shall be able to stand when the day of the wrath of the Lamb is come?'[1] Mark well, 'the day of the wrath of the Lamb!' not the wrath of a tiger or of a furious bear, 'from which they have carried away her whelps,'[2] but of the Lamb—that Lamb who formerly 'opened not His mouth before His shearers.'[3] Alas! these tepid souls will then cry out to the mountains and rocks: 'Fall upon us and hide us from the wrath of the Lamb.'[4] But the latter with all the insignia of a Judge, seated upon the clouds, encompassed by His angels, will roar like a lion. He will exclaim in a voice of thunder. The Lord is 'a great God, mighty and terrible, who accepteth no person nor taketh bribes.'[5]

Miserable that I am! With what terror shall I not be seized when I perceive that I must appear as a culprit before Him whom I have treated with such indignity and contempt in the Eucharist, when I hear from the lips of this inexorable Judge these appalling words: 'I am that Jesus whom thou didst receive with coldness and indifference when He went to abide with thee, that Jesus to whom thou didst offer so many outrages in the sacrament of His love; whose infinitely holy Body thou didst receive into thy heart with as little attention as if it were but ordinary bread. I am no longer the Spouse of thy soul, I am the avenger of thy offences; I am no longer a lamb, but a lion about to expiate in His wrath His Blood profaned by thy tepidity and irreverences.' With what sentiments do these threats inspire me? For if the blood of Abel 'crying out from the earth'[6] to the throne of God obtained such severe retribution, what

[1] Apoc. vi. 17. [2] 2 Kings xvii. 8. [3] Acts viii. 32.
[4] Apoc. vi. 16. [5] Deut. x. 17. [6] Gen. iv. 10.

effect shall not the blood of Jesus Christ invoking vengeance of His Father for my profanations produce?

What shall also be my terror when, descending from the Judge to the delinquent, I shall find that by my tepidity in communion I remained dry and sterile though immersed in an ocean of graces; cold and gelid though environed with glowing furnaces of love; poverty-stricken though in the midst of divine riches? When I recall that, seated at the Sacred Table, I have shamefully sighed for the flesh-pots of Egypt; that after having so frequently extinguished my thirst at the Source of sanctity, I have afterwards plunged into the ordure of vice, and that desiring to quench my thirst at the rivers of Babylon, I have drunk of the cup of its infidelities; that, in fine, after so many communions I have not become better, I have not corrected any fault or acquired any virtue?

How awful shall be my anguish and dismay when I perceive that I could have easily attained perfection, and that I would not do so, but preferred remaining buried in a mortal tepidity? What shall I reply to Jesus Christ my Judge, when in a voice of fury He will bitterly reproach me for my sloth: 'What is there that I ought to do more for my vineyard that I have not done to it?'[1] What gift is there more precious that I have not given it? Now then, 'inhabitants of Jerusalem, judge between me and my vineyard,'[2] 'I have brought up children, and have exalted them, but they have despised me.'[3] Those who 'did take sweetmeats together with me,'[4] and of whom I was myself the food, 'have violated me for a handful of barley and a piece of bread.'[5] 'My beloved grew fat and kicked; he grew fat and thick and

[1] Isaias v. 4. [2] Ibid. v. 3. [3] Ibid. i. 2.
[4] Ps. liv. 15. [5] Ezech. xiii. 19.

gross;'[1] satiated with my flesh and inebriated with my blood, he forsook me, who made him. 'He has repaid me evil for good: and hatred for my love.'[2] Ingrate! what can I reply to such reproaches?

Ah! I acknowledge to so many accusations 'I cannot answer one for a thousand;' convinced of my tepidity, 'my own mouth shall condemn me.'[3] For whoever is nourished on the Divinity without becoming fervent is utterly inexcusable. Alas! I have repeatedly lodged the Author of purity in my heart, and I am still stained with so many vices! I have been so often satiated with the Bread of Angels, and I still continue the slave of irregular affections and even of sin! The God of the Eucharist, not content with annihilating Himself within me, has accumulated miracle upon miracle to beg at the door of my heart for some little return of love, and my insensibility is unmoved, I repay such incomparable love with the coldest ingratitude. I remain immersed in indifference.

Oh, heavens! 'we should withdraw from this Sacred Table audacious as lions, breathing only fire and terrible to hell,'[4] and we quit it with an icy heart, a subject of derision to Satan. Nourished on the heavenly Lamb, Sanctity Itself, we still remain steeped in iniquity: satiated with a God, we still entertain a relish for earthly things: replenished with Jesus Christ, we still run after creatures: inebriated with the divine drink, we thirst for the turbid waters of the world! O Seraphim! veil your faces with your wings, that you behold not such behaviour.

Alas! at the awful Judgment, 'what excuse shall we allege for having succumbed to such weakness after

[1] Deut. xxxii. 15. [2] Ps. cviii. 5. [3] Job ix. 3, 20. [4] St. Chrys. Hom.

having been nourished on such fortifying food?' Ah, woe, woe to us on account of the wrath of the Lamb! seized with a salutary fear at the thought of the dread tribunal which shall be erected against tepid souls, 'let us go with confidence to the throne of grace: that we may obtain mercy, and find that grace and the seasonable aid,'[1] which Jesus Christ so liberally offers to those who devoutly approach the Blessed Eucharist.

Article III.

Of the love of Jesus Christ for us in the Blessed Eucharist.

The charity which Jesus Christ bears to us in the Eucharist is truly excessive and incomprehensible; for He gives Himself whole and entire, he gives Himself to all, in all places and in all times. Cannot a love so prodigal of itself succeed in inducing us to approach the holy Mysteries with fervour?

1. *He gives Himself entire.*

In this sacrament of His love Jesus Christ gives us not the stars of the firmament with their lustre, nor earthly riches, nor the treasures contained in the bosom of the deep, but He bestows Himself, and Himself whole and entire with His Body, His Blood, His Soul, His Divinity, with the infinite and inexhaustible exuberance of His merits: He excepts, reserves, refuses nothing; on the contrary, 'He most gladly spends Himself for the salvation of our souls.'[2] Not only does He desire to repose 'as a bundle of myrrh on our breast,'[3] but He descends into our hearts to become our food. What astounding charity! 'but there is not any other nation

[1] Heb. iv. 16. [2] 2 Cor. xii. 15. [3] Cant. i. 12.

so great, so favoured that hath gods so nigh them, as our God is present to us.'[1]

Divine Redeemer, passionately enamoured of our nothing! it does not then satisfy Thee to have given us Thy stars to enlighten us, the earth to supply our wants, Thy angels to protect us, to have imprinted Thy image on this clay of which we are formed; to have exalted our nature in Thy person to the Throne of the august Trinity, and to have destined us to a heavenly inheritance by ransoming us from hell at the price of a painful and ignominious death: Thou deignest also, infinitely great as Thou art, to give, to dispense Thyself to us, to lavish Thyself wholly upon us in such an admirable manner. 'Who hath ever heard such a thing? and who hath seen the like of this?'[2]

O Seraphim! be silent with astonishment at so astounding a prodigy, 'and let there be' also 'silence in heaven;' suspend your eternal canticle to the thrice holy God, to worship this new miracle. 'My God is become my food, the Word of the Father, my aliment! the wisdom of God, the Banquet of my soul!' 'O men! Him whom the angels do not behold without trembling, and whom they do not even dare to look upon, being unable to support the dazzling splendour of His glory, we eat, we unite to our being.'

'O God! truly prodigal of Thyself in Thy desire to give Thyself to men.' Ah! if I am already indebted to Thee for everything, since Thou hast created and redeemed me, with how much greater reason should I not belong to Thee, when Thou becomest my food? What ingratitude should I presume to refuse Thee, my love, if, repaying Thy ardent charity by a callous insensibility,

[1] Deut. iv. 7. [2] Isaias lxvi. 8.

I approached Thy divine Banquet with coldness and tepidity.

2. *He gives Himself to all.*

The goodness of this loving Saviour extends still farther; He gives Himself to all without exception or distinction. 'Come all to me,' He cries, 'and I will refresh you.'[1] But what sayest Thou, O Divine Jesus! how far then does Thy love carry Thee? 'What is man that Thou shouldst magnify him? or why dost Thou set Thy heart upon him.'[2] What is the son of man that Thou visitest him? We are but 'vanity, dust, and ashes,'[3] 'and dost Thou think it meet to open Thy eyes upon such an one?'[4]

Alas! those to whom Thou thus givest Thyself as food are not merely despicable, blind, ignorant, slow to do good, prompt to commit evil, subject to instability, corruption, and countless miseries; they are cold, irreverent, ungrateful, sometimes even sacrilegious, new Judases, who do not hesitate to profane the Bread of Angels.

Thou knowest it, O my God! and still Thou persistest in Thy design with unalterable bounty. Thou invitest us all without distinction, Thou criest out to us: 'Come, eat my bread and drink the wine which I have mingled for you.'[5] Thou even invitest to this great feast 'the poor, and the weak, and the blind, and the lame.'[6] Thou commandest the exercise of a sweet violence to compel them to enter. Oh! inconceivable miracle of Thy yearning charity for us! Divine Lover of souls! hadst Thou prepared this banquet for the heavenly spirits or even the august Queen of angels, it would be an incomprehensible miracle: what then must it be to have prepared

[1] Matt. xi. 28. [2] Job vii. 17. [3] Ps. xxxviii. 6.
[4] Job xiv. 3. [5] P v. ÷ 5. [6] Luke xiv. 21.

it for the entire human race? For men, contemptible worms of the earth, a handful of ashes, a covering of corruption; that Thou hast prepared it not merely for the mighty and the learned, but for all, for the dregs of the people, the illiterate, the poor, in a word, for those of the most infamous condition! That Thou admittest to it not alone simple, fervent, pious souls, but wicked, impious men, defiled with every abomination. What! can it be also that Thou invitest us all with the tenderest affection, lovingly receiving at Thy table those who present themselves, calling and inviting those who have a repugnance for this sacred manna, and making a precept of it to oblige them to approach Thee, thus to conquer their resistance? This it is that immeasurably enhances the greatness of Thy benefit. There it is more than any of the other mysteries, yes, there it is that our divine Assuerus 'shows us all the riches of His Kingdom,'[1] and displays to us the generosity and the magnificence of His love: and nevertheless the effusions of His love are not yet exhausted.

3. *He gives Himself without any distinction of time or place.*

'Hear, O ye heavens! and give ear O earth,'[2] to hear the 'wonders God hath wrought'[3] in our behalf. Not content with having given Himself wholly as food to a miserable creature, He multiplies this benefit by being ready to make us participators in it at all times and in all places. Had He deigned to be consecrated in one place of the universe alone, in one single city, one temple, and to assume the appearance of bread, I do not say to be eaten, but merely to be adored; had He limited the

[1] Esther i. 4. [2] Isaias i. 2. [3] Ps. cv. 2.

concession of so priceless a grace to some days, months, or at most a few years: had He empowered the Sovereign Pontiff alone to sacrifice Him on the altar, every tongue should extol such an excess of bounty! What shall we say, then, O too loving Jesus! when not only Thou grantest us Thy presence in so admirable a manner, but also condescendest to be received by us as ordinary food, and that in every place, in every country of the world, during nineteen centuries? Thousands of priests have been honoured with the power of immolating Thee; and this astounding miracle shall last until the end of time, according to Thy promise: 'I am with you even to the consummation of the world.'[1]

Oh, Divine Master! 'meek and humble of heart!'[2] No! there is no hovel so wretched, no temple so poor, no sanctuary so unadorned wherein Thou refusest to dwell for us; there is no street so miserable through which Thou dost not pass; no hut so indigent to which Thou dost not repair; no invalid so repulsive that Thou dost not visit; 'Thou settest Thy tabernacle in the midst of us,'[3] 'Thou becomest one of us.'[4] Thou art not ashamed either of our poverty or our baseness; Thou dost not repulse any of our ministers; Thou comest to us wretched creatures as often as we please; Thou makest no exception of seasons, or months, or days, or moments of the day. To what an excess does Thy love, this ruling passion of Thy heart, incite Thee! to what a state of abjection does it reduce Thee, 'O King of kings!'[5] The manna which was preserved formerly as a memento of Thy benefits could only be deposited in the one Ark of the Covenant and preserved in one Temple, the most august in the

[1] Matt. xxviii. 20. [2] Matt. xi. 29. [3] Levit. xxvi. 11.
[4] Gen. iii. 22. [5] Apoc. xvii. 14.

universe, in one only city, the royal Jerusalem, in the Holy of Holies, where none but the High Priest, and he but once a year, was permitted to enter. And by a miracle which overwhelms the understanding, Thou 'under whom they stoop that bear up the world,'[1] Thou givest Thyself whole and entire to us who are so wretched. . . . Thou immolatest Thyself at all hours, Thou descendest into the poorest churches. Ah! 'my breath is stopped,'[2] astonishment and admiration deprive me of speech! 'O hidden God!'[3] Were a Cherub, clothed with our nature, to visit a poor cottage, were he to permit us to see and honour him there, it would be a great favour; were a Seraph to make us the priceless present of the fringe of Thy robe, a curl of Thy hair, a drop of Thy sweat, it would be a magnificent gift; and yet all that would not fully satisfy the insatiable desires of our heart.

But that Thou, the Master of heaven and earth, who 'thought it not robbery to be equal with God,'[4] that Thou shouldst give Thyself to us entire, concealed under weak species, on all altars, in all chalices, frequently laid on soiled and torn linen, not merely to be adored but to be eaten by all men without distinction; not once, nor in one place only, but in all times, in all places, and sometimes even at the will of an impious priest, this is a miracle so stupendous, so exalted, that it exhausts in some manner the efforts of Thy omnipotence, the inventions of Thy wisdom and the tenderness of Thy love!

In presence of this ineffable mystery what can we do except to imitate in our weakness the 'four-and-twenty ancients' of the Apocalypse, who, laying aside their crowns, 'fell down' before 'the Lamb,' offering Him the

[1] Job ix. 13. [2] Dan. x. 17. [3] Isaias xlv. 15. [4] Philip. ii. 6.

incense of their adorations and singing 'a new canticle on golden harps.'[1] Yes, at the sight of this adorable Sacrifice, we also, in transports of gratitude, should proclaim aloud 'with all living creatures: The Lamb is worthy to receive power, and divinity, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and benediction.'[2]

And wherefore should we not proclaim the marvellous effects of His love? If Solomon, looking at the temple he had built, and where 'God dwelt only in a' miraculous 'cloud,'[3] cried out, in his astonishment: 'Is it credible then that God should dwell with men on earth?'[4] If Miphiboseth, a prince of the blood royal, son of Jonathan and heir to the throne, surprised at the condescension of David, who had deigned to say to him: 'Thou shalt eat bread at my table always,' could only answer him: 'Who am I, thy servant, that thou shouldst look upon such a dead dog as I am?'[5] what should be our sentiments, oh, infinitely holy God, who not only eat at the 'King's table,'[6] who not only behold the Lord's glory, but who absolutely receive the Lord of Glory, concealed under the appearance of ordinary bread, and who often receive Him into a heart but ill-prepared!

When Mary, who was but a pure creature, and her cousin, went to visit Elizabeth, the latter, unable to restrain her admiration, cried out in the transports of her joy: 'Whence is this to me that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?'[7] St. Peter, when Jesus wished to enter his bark, wholly astonished, fell down at the knees of his Divine Master, saying: 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.'[8] O heavens! what should be the ardour of our affection when we behold 'the Lord of lords'[9]

[1] Apoc. v. 8. [2] Apoc. v. 12. [3] 2 Paralip. vi. 1.
[4] 2 Paralip. vi. 18. [5] 2 Kings ix. 7. [6] 2 Kings ix. 7.
[7] Luke i. 43. [8] Luke v. 8. [9] Apoc. xvii. 14.

giving Himself wholly to us in all places and times in so surprising a manner?

O Divine Victim of love! 'Thy eyes did see my imperfect being.'[1] Thou knowest that 'we are not sufficient to think anything good of ourselves, as of ourselves;' but that 'all our sufficiency is from God.'[2] I, at length, abhor the apathy with which I have till now approached the holy mysteries. Grant me grace to believe with St. Peter that 'Thou art the Son of the living God,'[3] to adore Thee with St. Thomas as 'my Lord and my God,'[4] to confess with the centurion that 'I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof:'[5] to strike my breast like the publican, and, in the bitterness of my grief, to cry out with him: 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.'[6]

Grant that, with the afflicted woman of the Gospel, I may firmly believe that 'I shall be made whole,'[7] since I so frequently touch not the hem of Thy robe, but Thy adorable Body itself. Grant me, like David, 'to love Thee, Lord, who art my strength,'[8] 'to render to Thee for all Thou hast rendered to me,'[9] 'to offer Thee a heart humble and contrite,'[10] and inflamed with Thy love. Assist me 'to offer' Thee 'the widow's two mites,'[11] by correcting myself of such a vice which displeases Thee most, and practising such a virtue which Thou particularly demandest from me.

Article IV.

Of the excellence of the Holy Sacrifice and the dignity of Priests.

The motives we have just adduced for the fervent reception of the Bread of Angels are applicable to all the

[1] Ps. cxxxviii. 16. [2] 2 Cor. iii. 5. [3] Matt. xvi. 16. [4] John xx. 28. [5] Matt. viii. 8. [6] Luke xviii. 13. [7] Matt. ix. 22. [8] Ps. xvii. 2. [9] Ps. cxv. 12. [10] Ps. l. 19. [11] Mark xii. 42.

faithful, whatever may be their condition. Let us now consider the peculiar ones which render it incumbent on a minister of the altar to participate worthily in the sacred Banquet: they are based on the excellence of the Holy Sacrifice and on the sublimity of the sacerdotal state.

1. *The excellence of the Holy Sacrifice.*

We can conceive nothing more excellent than the Holy Sacrifice of the altar, if we consider—1, the dignity of the principal Sacrificer; 2, the sanctity of the Victim; 3, the majesty of Him to whom it is offered; 4, the manner in which He immolates Himself; 5, the admirable ends of this divine Sacrifice.

1. The principal Sacrificer: It is the only son of God made man, who has been anointed by His Eternal Father '*a Priest for ever, according to the order of Melchisedech:*'[1] as for us His ministers, we are at the altar but His representatives and the instruments of His boundless charity.

2. The victim which is offered: It is the person of Jesus Christ who resides in the Eucharist, and in some degree in a more admirable manner than in heaven; it is His human nature, hypostatically united to the Word, seated now 'at the right hand of the power of God;'[2] impassible, immutable, glorious, 'and higher than the heavens.'[3] Could there be a victim more holy or more perfect?

3. The God who receives and believes it worthy of Him is the omnipotent Monarch, the one Eternal, the supreme Lord, who 'does not give His glory to another,'[4] because His divinity is incommunicable.

4. 'The immolation of this august Victim,' says the

[1] Heb. v. 6. [2] Luke xxii. 69. [3] Heb. vii. 26. [4] Isaias xlii. 8.

Council of Trent, 'is accomplished by an act of transubstantiation, that is to say, by the changing of the offerings into the very Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, and five words suffice to operate in an instant this prodigy which contains the perfection of miracles and of the most incomprehensible wonders.'

This august Sacrifice is offered to adore God, to thank Him, to implore the pardon of our sins, and to obtain His graces. This holy oblation renders to the sovereign Lord all the honour due to Him; it is an adequate thanksgiving for all the benefits He has bestowed upon the universe. Each time that it is renewed it possesses a sovereign efficacy, an omnipotent power to obtain for us all blessings, and to expiate, by a condign satisfaction, the sins of the whole human race. It possesses, in fine, an infinite value, though limited in its application, which God always proportions to our merits and the dispositions of our soul.

Of all the actions which can engage the mind of man, the immolation of this adorable Victim is the most beneficial and august. A single Mass not alone honours the Divine Majesty, more than all the virtues and the praises of the saints, but it also gives Him more glory than all the sins of men, taken collectively, can deprive Him of.

So countless and stupendous are the miracles wrought during the Holy Sacrifice, so important, and of such absorbing interest, that the most momentous negotiations of the mightiest earthly potentates are but as child's play compared therewith.

Lastly, the oblation made at the holy altar is not only a vivid representation of the painful death which our loving Redeemer endured for us on Mount Calvary; it is a real renewal of it, for it reiterates in an unbloody

manner the same holocaust which Jesus Christ, at once the Priest and Victim, offered on the Cross by the effusion of His Blood.

The virtue of a Victim so spotless effaces our sins, closes hell, opens heaven, ransoms our souls, merits innumerable graces for us, and elevates us to so sublime a dignity that we are entitled 'to be called, and are in effect the children of God.'[1]

2. *On the dignity of Priests.*

The excellence of the Holy Sacrifice is the most just criterion of the excellence of the Christian Priesthood.

Priests excel the angels, not by the superiority of their nature, but by the power which is given them. 'The most High and infinitely good God,' says St. John Chrysostom, 'has not granted to angels the power with which He has invested priests;' 'and when the latter offer the adorable Victim,' adds St. Augustine, 'the blessed spirits assist thereat only as servants.' 'But,' resumes the same holy doctor, 'if the heavenly Intelligences are at the altar the servants of the priest, he, by the excellence of his ministry, rises above the condition of his nature to a superiority over the Cherubim and Seraphim.'

The sacerdotal dignity surpasses, in some measure, even that of the august Mother of God. 'It is not to Mary but to priests,' says Pope Innocent III., 'that the Almighty has entrusted the Keys of the Kingdom of heaven, with power to renew in all places and at all times, in a mystical manner, the great mystery of the Incarnation.' Therefore it is that St. Augustine cries out: 'Oh, venerable dignity of priests, in whose hands the Son of God becomes incarnate anew, as He formerly

[1] John iii. 1.

became incarnate in the womb of Mary,' and even with circumstances which enhance the prerogatives of their exalted ministry. For Mary gave life only once to the Saviour, and it was a life subject to outrages, sufferings, and death; while, on the contrary, the priest who celebrates give Him a life, which is impassible, immortal, and glorious.

The sacerdotal dignity is, then, not merely superior to all that is great among creatures, but we may also say its pre-eminence reaches to the throne of the Divinity itself, since it is granted to the priest to operate wonders, the accomplishment of which demands the exercise of the divine omnipotence. For, 'the dispenser of the mysteries of God'[1] takes his place at the sacred tribunal, judges souls, and remits sins: in the consecration of the Eucharist he commands Jesus Christ, and God obeys the voice of a man. At his behest He descends from the highest heavens to the altar, attended by the magnificent retinue of His infinite perfections. What miracles!

Inspired by the Holy Ghost, and addressing the Lord's anointed, the Royal Prophet enthusiastically exclaims: 'I have said: you are gods, the strong gods of the earth, and the sons of the Most High:'[2] it is really true, the Almighty 'hath done great things'[3] in His priests. He has given them 'a great name, like unto the name of the great ones that are on the earth.'[4] He has exalted them above the Principalities and Dominations, by communicating to them a power truly divine.

We must acknowledge, therefore, that there is nothing more venerable, nothing more glorious, than the dignity of priests, and exclaim with St. Augustine that 'their

[1] 1 Cor. iv. 1. [2] Ps. lxxxi. 6, and Ps. xlvi. 10. [3] Luke i. 49.
[4] 2 Kings vii. 9.

sublime prerogatives should excite the astonishment of heaven, elicit the admiration of earth, transport the heavenly spirits with joy, and fill the reprobates and hell with horror and dismay.'

3. *Consequences of this doctrine.*[1]

Article V.

On the dispositions and conditions requisite for communicating worthily.

We might dilate at length on this matter, by proposing various practices for communicating well: however, such is not our intention. We shall simply explain some of the chief means of approaching the Holy Table devoutly. Without doubt, what has been said respecting the holy Eucharist has inspired us with an ardent desire to participate frequently in and understand the dispositions we should bring with us to the reception of this most adorable Sacrament. Whatever may be our state or condition, priest or laic, we could neither offer in sacrifice nor receive with fruit the Victim of salvation, unless we did so with attention, a respectful fervour, perfect purity of heart, and detachment from creatures, and unless we spent a sufficient time in preparing for so holy an action.

1. *Attention.*

When we approach the heavenly Banquet, let us reflect seriously on the divine food presented to us and on our own baseness. It is Wisdom itself which gives us this advice. 'When thou shalt sit to eat with a prince, con-

[1] (Note of French translator.) All this number, and some paragraphs of No. 4, of 5th article of this chapter, relate so especially to priests that it has appeared to us useless to translate them. We shall only give them, therefore, in the Latin text of our author, at the end of this chapter.

sider diligently what is set before thee.'[1] We should not approach the Holy Table, therefore, with levity and carelessness, but with a religious attention and solicitude, discerning with the eye of faith the priceless value of the adorable food there offered to us, and the nothingness of him who receives it. There is no reflection more calculated than this to concentrate all the energies of our soul on the action we are about to perform in communicating.

The following are two excellent means of sustaining and preserving our attention. The first consists in a kind of prelude. For example: represent to yourself the Sovereign Majesty quitting His throne of glory and descending on the altar which He envelops in a mysterious cloud, as He formerly 'surrounded the Holy of Holies;'[2] then imagine that you behold all the choirs of the blessed accompanying the Monarch of the universe, and legions of angels filled with awe encompassing the Divine Host.

If you are a priest, consider yourself as the minister of Jesus Christ, the mediator of the human race, appointed to appease the divine wrath, placed between God and man as another Aaron between the living and the dead: see the Church militant and the poor souls in purgatory stretching out their suppliant hands to you as their advocate and reconciler.

Such thoughts are calculated to arrest and restrain the wanderings of our imagination. In effect, these preludes being recommended to us as a preservative against distractions during meditation, it is evident we may derive the same advantage from them, should we employ them when preparing for communion.

[1] Prov. xxiii. 1. [2] 3 Kings viii. 10.

The second consists in making ourselves or borrowing from some pious books a good method of communicating; the forms of prayers and the pious considerations which they contain will serve to reanimate us when we feel ourselves disposed to fall into aridity and distractions. By this second practice we can contrive to fix the inconstancy of our imagination and keep ourselves in a habit of recollection.

Let us remark that, as a rule, it is better to elicit those acts in the interior of our souls than to make them with the lips; however, it is sometimes desirable to pronounce them vocally when the dulness or aridity of our mind deprives us of a relish for devotion.

2. *Fervour.*

Fervour is the natural consequence and fruit of attention. 'It is a fire,' says St. Laurence Justinian, 'but one that requires to be constantly fed by the addition of fuel and fanned by the breath of good desires.' The understanding furnishes us by reflection on the happy effects of the Divine Food which is offered to us with the fuel suitable to maintain this fire. The will produces the breath of holy desires by the pious avidity and holy ardour with which it solicits itself to approach the sacred Banquet.

We may take for the subject of these reflections the points which we have explained more in detail in the beginning of this chapter, and which we shall epitomize here.

1. The excellence of the holy Eucharist: it is wholly divine and incomprehensible on account of the Person who resides there, the manner in which He resides there, and the purpose for which He resides there.

2. Its effects: It is a throne of grace for fervent souls: the God whom they receive there can grant them all

manner of blessings since He is omnipotent; He has the will to do so, for having bestowed Himself what can He refuse? But on the contrary, the Blessed Eucharist is for the tepid a tribunal of Divine Justice, a tribunal awful on account of the person of the Judge, it is the same Jesus whom we have treated so contemptuously in His mystery of Love; the quality of the accuser which is the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, profaned by our guilty apathy, and demanding vengeance against us; the account we will have to render and which shall be terrific in proportion to the inestimable value of the graces we have neglected.

3. The charity of Jesus Christ: He gives Himself wholly and unreservedly in this Sacrament; He gives Himself to all, repulsing no one; He gives Himself in all places and all times without exception.

4. The infinite value of the Holy Sacrifice, owing to the dignity of Him who offers it, the sanctity of the Victim, the Majesty of God to whom it is offered, the admirable manner in which it is immolated, and the sublime end of this divine oblation.

5. The super-eminent dignity of priests, whose power renders them superior to the angels, exalts them in some measure above the Queen of heaven, and equals them, so to speak, to Jesus Christ and God Himself: whence results to them the strict obligation of aspiring to a high degree of sanctity, that their life being free from sin it may not contrast with the sublime honour with which they are invested.

6. The attributes of the Eucharist: it is the memorial of God's omnipotence; the mirror wherein is reflected the sanctity of Jesus Christ by the virtues He there practises; it is the miracle of divine love, for the Saviour

instituted this Sacrament on the eve of the death He was about to suffer for our crimes, though He foresaw the sacrilegious abuse which would be made of it and the outrages He would have to endure from the impious and for wicked Christians.

A short but serious reflection on one of these points, which may be meditated successively by distributing them according to the days of the week, will be of great use to us for the maintenance of fervour. The more attentively we ponder these truths, the more shall our love increase; for, 'as the wood of the forest is, so the fire burneth,'[1] 'if the wood faileth, the fire shall infallibly go out.'[2]

However, it is not enough that our understanding supply in some sort, by such considerations, the wood proper to preserve our fervour; the will must also inflame and augment it by its affections and holy desires. Jesus Christ Himself 'desired with desire to eat this divine pasch'[3] with us, to teach us that one of the best dispositions for approaching this adorable Sacrament is an ardent desire for its reception. 'This heavenly Bread,' says St. Augustine, 'demands that the interior man hunger for it, and it satiates such only as render themselves worthy of it by the fervour of their desires.'

Yes, the greater our desire for this Bread of angels, the more delicious shall we find it, and the more copious the graces wherewith it shall enrich us. The God of the Eucharist 'fills the hungry with good things,' but 'He leaves those empty'[4] of His favours who receive Him without affection through routine or for the sake of appearances. 'Let us beware of manifesting indifference when He condescends to lavish so many proofs of love

[1] Eccli. xxviii. 12. [2] Prov. xxvi. 20. [3] Luke xxii. 15. [4] Luke i. 53.

and honour upon us. See with what avidity little children apply their lips to their mothers' breast! let us approach the Holy Table with equal eagerness; let us apply our lips with equal ardour to the chalice of salvation; let but one regret have power to affect us—that of being deprived of this divine food.'

On the day on which we are to communicate, and even from the eve, we should from time to time make acts of desire, saying, for example: 'Who shall give me, O my Brother! to find Thee and kiss Thee?'[1] 'As the hart panteth after the fountains of waters, so my soul panteth after Thee, my God. My soul thirsteth after the strong living God.'[2] 'Lord, all my desire is before Thee, and my groaning is not hidden from Thee.'[3]

These pious reflections, but especially these ardent sighs, are so many fiery darts, which wound the heart of our God. Let us examine ourselves, and see in what manner we are resolved to follow the advice we have just received.

3. *Purity of heart and detachment from creatures.*

To communicate worthily and beneficially, it is requisite that great purity of heart and a genuine detachment from creatures accompany us to the Holy Table; in other words, that we be exempt from venial sin and renounce all inordinate affections.

Our soul must be: 1. Free from all actual revolt of the evil propensities of the heart and all dangerous friendship, and free from all feelings of aversion, hatred, revenge, ambition, and jealousy.

2. Superior to its vicious inclinations, particularly those which flatter the senses, self-love, and a deordinate attachment to honours and the conveniences of life.

[1] Cant. viii. 1. [2] Ps. xli. 1. [3] Ps. xxxvii. 10.

3. Exempt from all reprehensible attachment to creatures, even the holiest. He who communicates should elevate himself to these sublime degrees of purity and innocence. It is this that is typified by the beauty of the 'wedding garment'[1] required by the Gospel of all the guests at this Divine Banquet, and by the mysterious action of Jesus Christ, who washed the feet of His disciples before the Last Supper, 'being desirous to teach them,' says St. Bernard, 'that they should be free from the slightest faults, even such as they were wont to commit without scruple, and which adhere to the soul as dust clings to the soles of the feet.'

There should be 'no blemish' in the young people whom Nabuchodonosor 'appointed to dine off the meats of his table.'[2] The Almighty commanded that the Ark of the Covenant, destined for the preservation of the manna, should be covered with gold, and that the table on which the loaves of proposition were deposited should be of 'purest gold,'[3] and it excites surprise, says St. Denis the Areopagite, 'that the God of infinite sanctity, "who feedeth among the lilies," who is Himself "the Flower of the Field" and the "Lily of the Valley,"[4] exacts perfect purity from those who receive Him!'

Though venial sin and a too natural affection for creatures do not absolutely prevent the growth of grace, they are, nevertheless, according to the doctrine of St. Thomas,[5] an impediment to the perfect plenitude of the divine gifts which the virtue of this adorable Sacrament communicates to souls perfectly free from sin.

Faults, even such as are slight, and vicious affections, are likewise directly contrary to the intention which

[1] Matt. xxii. 11. [2] Dan. i. 4. [3] Exod. xxv. 24.
[4] Cant ii 1. [5] 3 q. 79, a. 8.

Jesus Christ proposes to Himself in the Blessed Eucharist of uniting Himself unreservedly to us. 'It is in order that we may be one thing with Him,' says St. John Chrysostom, 'that He has incorporated Himself with us and mingled His body with ours.'[1] 'The consequence of the participation of the Body and Blood of the Lord,' says St. Leo, 'is that we are changed into the food we take.' It would seem as though our Saviour Himself deigned to reveal this consoling truth to St. Augustine: 'I am the food of the strong; thou shalt not change me into thee, as thou transformest ordinary food into thy substance, but thou shalt be changed into me.' It is true, therefore, that our transmutation into Jesus Christ, or, as the Council of Florence expresses it, 'the identification, in some sort, of man with his God, with whom he incorporates himself by communion, is the last end of this mystery.'

But, I repeat it, even venial sin and disorderly affections are an obstacle to the principal fruit which the Blessed Eucharist should produce. For so long as an inordinate attachment shall separate our heart from God, there is no possibility of a union between them, any more than between 'iron and clay.'[2]

As there can be no communication between Ismael and Isaac, Agar and Sarah, Dagon and the Ark, so there can be no relation between the flesh-pots of Egypt or affections which are purely natural and this heavenly manna. 'Our God is a jealous God, who will not suffer a rival in our love.'[3] He desires to reign alone in hearts, to be adored alone on the altar of our soul. He admits no division in the empire He wishes to exercise; He will not tolerate a participation in it with any idol.

[1] Serm. on B. Sacrament. [2] Dan. ii. 43. [3] Exod. xxxiv. 14.

If we do not prepare for Him a pure dwelling free from all profane attachments, He will not abide with us; He will retire, leaving us destitute of His graces.

Yes, these slight faults, these inordinate attachments, are odious stains, horrible wounds, livid ulcers, which inspire the heart of the heavenly Bridegroom with an insuperable disgust and render our intimate union with Him impossible.

Let us descend into the depths of our conscience, and examine candidly whether the promise of Scripture, 'You shall be changed into another man,'[1] 'into a perfect man,'[2] has been exemplified in us after so many communions; whether we can say with St. Paul, 'I live, now not I but Christ liveth in me.'[3] Is it not rather the world that lives in us, our flesh which still rebels, the old Adam, who instead of dying daily increases in strength?

Have we, according to the advice of the apostle, 'put off the old man and his works, to clothe ourselves with our Lord Jesus Christ?'[4] Do we not rather merit this reproach of the prophet Aggeus: 'You have eaten, but have not had enough; you have drunk, but have not been filled with drink.'[5] May not the Man-God address to us these words of the Royal Psalmist: 'What profit hast thou found in my Blood?'[6]

In vain hast thou been steeped therein, since thou hast withdrawn from the Holy Table as proud, covetous, impatient, passionate as thou wert before, thy love of ease and pleasure undiminished; and God grant that thou be not more guilty, since thou continuest susceptible as wax to the impressions of vice, and hard as adamant to the attractions of virtue!

[1] 1 Kings x. 6. [2] Ephes. iv. 13. [3] Gal. ii. 20.
[4] Ephes. iv. 22. [5] Agg. i. 6. [6] Ps. xxix. 10.

Let us reckon the faults we have corrected and the virtues we have acquired by participating in this Sacrament. Alas! let us beware of drawing on ourselves this malediction pronounced by David: 'May the table of their sacrifices be for them a rock,'[1] against which they shall perish. Would it not be the climax of misfortune should the infernal fowler employ this divine food as a bait to allure us into his nets?

To prevent the 'bread of life'[2] from being perverted in our regard into 'a sting of death,'[3] let us observe the following precautions in its reception.

1. If we know ourselves to be guilty of any venial sin more considerable than usual, let us purify our conscience by a good confession and an act of more perfect contrition. 'Venial sin,' says St. Thomas, 'prevents our experiencing the spiritual sweetness which sacramental communion procures.'[4]

2. Should any depraved inclination rebel and disturb our interior peace, we must immediately reduce it to subjection, combat it successfully by making acts of the contrary virtue, for 'the Lord dwells not in agitation.'[5] 'The God of peace' abhors tumult.

3. If our heart feel that it is strongly wedded to any creature, let us arm ourselves with the strength of Abraham, let divine love immolate our Isaac with the sword of the Spirit, to the Divine Guest who is about to visit us. Our generosity will obtain for us, as for this holy patriarch, the most abundant benedictions.

4. *The time necessary.*

Lastly, to participate worthily in the Holy Table, we must spend a sufficient and appropriate time in the pre-

[1] Ps. lxviii. 23. [2] John vi. 35. [3] 1 Cor. xv. 56.
[4] 3 q. 79, a. 8. [5] 3 Kings xix. 11. [6] Rom. xvi. 2.

paration for the Holy Sacrifice, in the celebration of it, and of thanksgiving after it.

First.—It is meet to devote at least a quarter of an hour to the preparation: pious souls are wont to do so. The Israelites did not eat the Paschal Lamb, the figure of the Eucharist, raw; they had it dressed: if treating the reality with less respect we receive this adorable Sacrament without the proper disposition or adequate preparation, how can it be otherwise than injurious to our soul?

We receive a greater abundance of graces, according as our preparation has been carefully made; for the divine gifts are always dispensed with a profusion and perfection proportionate to the fervour with which we dispose ourselves for their reception. Preparation is as essential to a good communion as it is to a good meditation; nay, so necessary is it, that by it we may prejudge what fruit we shall derive from the Blessed Eucharist.

* * * * * *

How shameful is it in the sight of angels and men, and even of the demons themselves, to see Christians devote less care to the preparation for so august an action than a worldling does for his adornment! to be more assiduous about vain studies than about the adorable Sacrifice! more watchful and reserved in the society of the great than in the presence of the immolated Host! more solicitous to assist at a convivial entertainment than at the Banquet of the Lamb!

This being the case, how can we be astonished if we continue so deficient in virtue, despite our having so frequently received the Author of all Justice, even though one communion well made would have sufficed to make us saints? Is it surprising that, nourished on Sanctity

itself, satiated with the flesh of a God, replenished with Jesus Christ, we still continue earthly, carnal, and stained with sin! The cause of this disorder is that we approach the Holy Table without preparation, or at most with a hurried, superficial, and tepid one. In order to remove this great barrier to the fruit we should derive from communion, let us faithfully devote, at least, a quarter of an hour to devout preparation for it. Alas! a whole year spent in this occupation alone would be inadequate to dispose us for so august a duty; how, then, can we find it difficult to consecrate a quarter of an hour to it?

Second.— * * * * *

Third.—Faith, reason, and gratitude alike render it obligatory on us to spend, at least, a quarter of an hour in thanksgiving after we have had the happiness of receiving Jesus Christ into our soul. If a subject honoured by a visit from his sovereign were so ungrateful as to pay no heed to his presence, not even condescending to look at him, continuing, on the contrary, to pursue his ordinary avocations, assuredly such misplaced behaviour would be deserving of chastisement. But what a retribution does not he merit who, by an inexcusable forgetfulness of his obligations, abandons the God of heaven and earth almost immediately after He has honoured his soul with His presence, to give himself up to secular business?

O man! the great Physician, descended from heaven, has entered thy soul to heal its wounds: thou possessest the Wisdom of the Eternal Father, who has come to dispel the darkness of thy ignorance: Infinite Goodness communicates Himself to thee with all His treasures, to enrich thee with His gifts; and thou avertest thy eyes, thou despisest His bounty, thou fliest the brightness of this Divine Sun, thou forsakest the fountain of life to draw

from broken cisterns, thou abandonest the Creator to run after creatures. This brief moment, during which the Heavenly Bridegroom visits thee in secret, is a favourable time, a day of life, an hour of salvation, a moment of grace; the Holy Ghost admonishes thee to defraud 'not thyself of the least part of this gift'[1] 'of God.' Thou believest this, and yet, satisfied with having rendered Him a maimed worship, thou imitatest Judas, who 'having received the morsel of bread went out immediately.'[2]

Senseless and spendthrift soul! thou knowest that in receiving thy God concealed under the Eucharistic veils, 'all good things come to thee together with Him;'[3] that 'His delights are to be with the children of men;'[4] that this Divine Merchant comes to display His richest merchandise and to invite thee by the voice of His prophet to supply thyself abundantly; 'Come,' says He, 'buy wine and milk without money and without any price.'[5] Thou contemnest His munificent offers, thou sighest after the flesh-pots of Egypt, thou thirstest for the wine of Babylon; weary even of the presence of so true a Friend, thou shunnest His tender embraces, thou fliest Him as though 'His conversation were accompanied with bitterness.'[6] What heartless and wanton ingratitude!

'I have not time,' thou sayest, 'to indulge interior recollection for any length of time after communion: other business urgently demands my attention.' But the interest of thy soul is also business, and not merely the most important but the only really necessary business: and the time immediately succeeding communion is that most proper to treat of it. Besides, what is this occupation which is so pressing that thou givest

[1] Eccli. xiv. 14. [2] John xiii. 29. [3] Wisd. vii. 11.
[4] Prov. viii. 31. [5] Isaias lv. 1. [6] Wisd. viii. 16.

it the precedence of that of thy salvation, and for which thou abandonest Jesus Christ, whose host thou art to-day? Institute a comparison between it and the care of thy salvation, and thou wilt be forced to admit that thou hast preferred glass to diamonds, dross to gold, trifles to thy most vitally important interests.

Granting, however, that thou art overwhelmed with care, and succumbing beneath the burden, thou wilt not deny that thou needest advice and support; but it is precisely in 'the Angel of the great Council,'[1] 'in the Mighty God,'[2] who dwells within thee, that thou wilt find both, if thou confidently tellest Him thy difficulties and trials. For it is in consulting the Divine Wisdom that thou wilt learn how to fulfil thy duties, and in invoking infinite Power that thou wilt obtain the strength to do so.

But, oh, the folly! emulating the example of Saul, we forsake the Ark to recur to the pythoness, we despise the assistance of the God of armies to 'make flesh our arm.'[3] We 'do not consult' the 'Lord,'[4] and we are deceived like Joshua by the Gabonites; we are habitually conquered by our enemies, and very rarely are our efforts crowned with success. Let us examine how our soul stands. Do we not say with ungrateful Israel: 'My soul loathes this food?'[5] How much time are we resolved to devote henceforward to thanksgivings? What affections do we propose to elicit? It would be well to have some pious book at hand, containing appropriate acts, to which we could recur in moments of aridity.

Let us believe, let us hope, let us thank, let us love, let us expose the wounds of our soul, let us implore the

[1] Lit. of the Holy Name of Jesus. [2] Isaias ix. 6. [3] Jerem. xvii. 5. [4] Josue ix. 14. [5] Numb. xxi. 5.

gifts of God; transported with love, let us exclaim with the Sacred Spouse: 'I have found Him whom my soul loveth: I will hold Him and I will not let Him go.'[1] He who has just come to dwell with us is our King, our God, our Spouse, our Physician, our Father, and our Brother: how can we find it difficult to love Him?

Let us, then, give ourselves up unreservedly to those holy affections, and we shall realise the truth of these words of St. Chrysostom: 'The property of this Adorable Mystery is to make us find a heaven upon earth during this mortal life.'[2] Let us not abridge the time that should be spent in the preparation for the Holy Sacrifice, in the celebration of it, or in the thanksgiving after it; for in these happy moments we receive, as it were, an anticipated pledge of eternal happiness: but, on the contrary, the more we curtail them through indevotion, the more severe and long shall be our expiation in the other life.

Of all the means given by God for the attainment of solid virtue, that which is incontestably the most efficacious is always to approach the Holy Table with attention of mind, fervour, perfect purity of heart, and detachment from creatures, and to spend a suitable time in the participation of the divine mysteries.

Artic. IV., No. 3.

Inferenda inde conclusio.

Nunc ergo jam adeste, ô 'Ministri Christi!'[3] ac muneris vestri statûsque dignitatem perpendite. 'Vos enim estis sal terræ, lux mundi, lucerna super candelabrum,

[1] Cant. iii. 4. [2] Homil. on 1st to Corinth. [3] 2 Cor. xi. 23.

civitas supra montem posita,'[1] et 'dispensatores mysteriorum Dei.'[2] 'Vos genus electum, regale sacerdotium, gens sancta, populus acquisitionis;'[3] quos SPIRITUS SANCTUS 'separavit ab omni plebe, jungens sibi;'[4] 'ac segregavit in ministerium suum;'[5] 'erigens de stercore pauperes; ut collocet vos cum principibus:'[6] 'ut annuntietis virtutes ejus:'[7] 'ut serviretis, et ministraretis ei:'[8] ut sitis oratores generis humani, consiliatores iratæ Nemesis, et omnipotentis misericordiæ instrumenta.

1°. Jam vero 'audite cœli, quæ loquor: audiat terra verba oris mei!'[9] et sequelæ, quam hinc infero, æquitatem dijudicent. Hæc ergo cum ita sint, ô Ministri Dei!'[10] tanta, tam augusta ac excellens cum sit vestri ordinis prærogativa, vos ipsi decernite, 'quanta igitur cordis contritione et fervore, quanta reverentia' et timore illud divinum et cœleste Sacrificium sit celebrandum.[11]

Vos ipsi concludite; 'quo crystallo non oporteat esse puriorem animam, tali fruentum convivio? quo solari radio non splendidiorem manum, quæ carnem hanc dividit? os, quod igne spirituali repletur? linguam, quæ tremendo nimis sanguine rubescit? qua denique re non sanctiorem esse conveniat animam, quæ tantum illum tamque dignum receperit Dominum?'[12]

Vos ipsi judicate, '(ut prudentibus loquor) vos ipsi judicate;'[13] an non indigna prorsus, horribilis et execranda res sit, sutorem majori cum solertia conficere calceum, quam vos hoc Sacramentum: cum majori attentione vos ambulantes confabulari cum socio, quam altari adstantes colloqui Dei: majori cum præsentia animi vos ludere, scribere, studere, quam ad aras litare?

[1] Matt. v. 13, *et seqq.* [2] 1 Cor. iv. 1. [3] 1 Pet. ii. 9. [4] Num. xvi. 9.
[5] 1 Paral. xxv. 1. [6] Ps. cxii. 7. [7] 1 Pet. ii. 19.
[8] Num. xvi. 9. [9] Deut. xxxii. 1. [10] Joel i. 13.
[11] Ambros. in præpar. ad missam. [12] Chrys. vi. de sacer. [13] 1 Cor. x. 15.

O Superi! exclamat os aureum: 'oporteret mystam liturgiæ incumbentem, omnem carnis cogitationem abjicere, è vestigio ad astra transferri, et nudo animo, mente pura solum circumspicere quæ ætherea sunt.'[1] Deberet sic esse purus et attentus, eoque ardoris æstu flagrare, 'ut, si in cœlis ipsis collocaretur, inter cœlestes illas virtutes medius stare posset.'[2]

Quam horrendum ergo (hominum hic cœlitumque fidem appello) quam fœdum, triste et abominandum erit spectaculum, eumdem mentis glacie totum quantum algere: cum ineptis cogitationibus velut cum totidem catellis pueriliter nugari, et quasi stupidum non attendere, quid agat: non intelligere, quid legat, in sacros calices non secus ac in pocula irruere: 'corpus Servatoris velut carnes pecudum manducare,'[3] et mimicis gestibus sui gradus ac dignitatis caracterem petulanter profanare; idque agere—ô sidera occulite radios!—idque agere (vah eloqui horreo!) ministrum Divinitatis, vicarium Redemptoris, internuncium sacrosanctæ Trinitatis, circumdatum Angelis, immixtum Sanctis, tota cœlesti curia stipatum; et quidem illo ipso tempore id agere, quo Jesum cœlis evocat, Verbum manibus tenet, et stupenda prodigia patrat: quo 'Christi cooperator, Dei adjutor, et sacramentorum dispensator existit:'[4] quo Ecclesiæ caduceatorem, fidelium conciliatorem, divinæ humanæque naturæ sequestrum agit; et coram justitiæ throno 'pro universo terrarum orbe legatus ac deprecator intercedit.'[5] Enimvero verba me deficiunt, quibus hujus rei indignitatem pro meritis exprimam.

Clamat quidem hypocrita contra Novatores, in altaris

[1] Chrys. iii. de sacer., 4. [2] Ibid. c. 3.
[3] S. Bonav. de præpar. ad missam, c. 4.
[4] S. Petrus Damiani, Op. de communi vita Canonicorum.
[5] Chrys. de sacer., 3.

Sacramento Salvatorem ipsum præsentem adesse, et interim ita se gerit, ac si ipse de hoc fidei dogmate dubitaret: ita tepide ac oscitanter sacrificam hanc oblationem peragit, ac si Numen non nisi ligneum aut plumbeum haberemus, quod ejusmodi irreverentias nec videat, nec sentiat: sacram liturgiam ea linguæ volubilitate deproperat, ac si latrones à tergo instarent, qui necem ei strictis mucronibus jamjam intentent.

Et hæc videtis, ô Potestates! nec tamen 'effunditis septem phialas iræ Dei in terram?'[1] Hæc cernitis ô Dominationes! nec tamen 'accipit armaturam zelus' vester, 'armando creaturam ad ultionem?'[2] Hæc spectatis, ô Virtutes! nec tamen fiunt 'fulgura, tonitrua, et terræ motus?'[3]

Ah! 'tenebrescant sol, et luna!'[4] 'obtenebrentur stellæ' caligine![5] ne hanc 'abominationem desolationis, stantem in loco sancto!'[6] oculis usurpare cogamur. Heu! spectaculum detestabile! minatur DEUS, terret Christus, pavent dæmones; et en! distractus adstat sacerdos. Venerabundi contremiscunt Angeli, ardent amore Sancti, oppressa miseriis gemit Ecclesia; et en! solus in medio positus languet sacerdos. 'Corpus Servatoris de panis transubstantiatur materia: descendit de cœlo in carne Verbum;'[7] et irreverenti gestu mysterii celsitatem infamat miraculi patrator mysta. 'Obstupescite, cœli, super hoc, portæ ejus, desolamini vehementer!'[8] Horrore concussa tremant fundamenta terræ, cum orbis Conditorem à petulanti vermiculo adeo viliter haberi cernant.

2°. 'At væ tali animæ! retributio enim manuum ejus

[1] Apoc. xvi. 1. [2] Sap. v. 18. [3] Apoc. xvi. 18. [4] Eccli. xii. 2. [5] Job iii. 6. [6] Matt. xxiv. 15. [7] Laur. Justin. Serm. de. Euch. [8] Jerem. ii. 12.

fiet ei.'[1] Nam teste Apostolo 'judicium sibi manducat et bibit, non dijudicans corpus Domini;'[2] id est (quæ Salmeronis expositio est), per ejusmodi languorem, præsertim diuturnior si sit, proxime disponitur ad prolapsionem in noxam gravem.[3]

O fulmen terrificum! heu! ad hujus ferale tonitru cui non 'tinniant ambæ aures?'[4] quid enim terribilius, quam quod ejusmodi homini 'panis vitæ'[5] fiat 'plaga mortis,'[6] et 'calix benedictionis'[7] vertatur in 'calicem furoris?'[8] quod 'auctor salutis'[9] 'illi sit causa perditionis,'[10] et scala ad cœlum ei evadat præcipitium ad orcum? quod ipse caracter sacerdotalis non nisi suspensa è collo asinaria sit mola, eo profundius illum ad ima demergens, quo altius super alios per illius præcellentiam fuerat evectus?

Proinde, ô minister Dei viventis! per aræ, cui adstas, sanctitatem te adjuro: cogita, quæso, 'quali sis insignitus honore, quali mensa fruaris;' et cave, ne 'sit honor sublimis, et vita deformis:'[11] ne tuo in sacris operando tepore summæ dignitati labem inuras, 'et spiritui gratiæ contumeliam facias;'[12] 'monstrosa enim res est (ait Bernardus), gradus summus, et animus infimus.' Secus, time vindicem Nemesis manum.

Si enim ultrix ira Numinis, ab Oza et Bethsamitis levi irreverentia læsum, arcæ honorem tanta strage punivit, quid tibi, ô miser! fiet? Inde enim elucet, ait sanctus Thomas de Villanova, 'quanti piaculi, simul et periculi res sit, indigne tractare, aut languide sumere sacrosanctum Christi corpus in hostia salutari, cujus in typum sic vindicavit. Væ ergo tepidis immolatoribus!

[1] Isaias iii. 11. [2] 1 Cor. xi. 29. [3] Disput. xix. in 1 Cor. xi.
[4] 4 Reg. xxi. 12. [5] Joan v. 35. [6] Apoc. xiii. 12.
[7] 1 Cor. x. 16. [8] Jerem. xxv. 15. [9] Heb. ii. 10.
[10] Phil. i. 28. [11] Chrys. Hom. iv. ad. pap. [12] Heb. x. 29.

si enim talis ultio in umbra, qualis fiet in veritate ? si ignoranter aut imprudenter videntes, aut tangentes typicam illam similitudinem, tam acerba morte damnati sunt, qua animadversio fiet in contemptores majestatis ?' ita Archipræsul Valentinus.[1] Et jure ; nam (verba sunt Petri Damiani) 'alias peccantes, quasi Dominum in rebus ejus offendimus ; oscitanter vero sacrificantes, velut in personam ejus manus injicere non timemus.'[2]

Quid ergo mirum quod, teste Apostolo, 'pro' ejusmodi 'peccatis jam non relinquatur hostia :'[3] et 'Dominus juraverit domui Heli, quod iniquitas domus ejus non expietur victimis et muneribus in æternum ?'[4] Quid mirum quod orbem multiplici malorum cataclysmo toties inundatum cernamus ! Nam quæ alia est causa, quod in Europa, à tumultuante, rebelli ferocia, hæresi, tot vastata fuerint regna, violata templa, polluta altaria, direpti calices, pulsi necatique sacerdotes ? Verbo : cur sacra nostra fuerint data 'in conculcationem, mutatus color optimus, et dispersi lapides sanctuarii ?'[5] quæ, inquam, alia tot damnorum (saltem aliqua ex parte) origo fuit, quam tepor obiter et cursim sacrificantium ? Hic enim, hic erat ille 'ventus turbinis veniens ab Aquilone,'[6] qui tam atras errorum, plagarum, et calamitatum nubes patriæ invexit. Hic illas 'septem phialas aureas plenas iracundiæ Dei per exeuntes de templo Angelos'[7] in terras nostras effudit.

Nempe mavult summa illa nullius indiga Majestas omnino carere victimis, altaribus, et templis, quam ea sacrilego mystarum languore profanata conspicere. Argumento nobis sunt gemina illa veteris testamenti monu-

[1] Conc. iii. in Fest. Christi. [2] In opusc. de comm. vita Canonic.
[3] Heb. x. 16. [4] 1 Reg. iii. 13. [5] Thren. iv. 12.
[6] Ezec. i. 4. [7] Apoc. xv. 6.

menta, arca scilicet et templum, quæ ambo ob sacerdotum culpas primum hosti, demum et igni in spolium cessere. Nam (ut narrant divinæ paginæ) non solum duo 'filii Heli mortui sunt, Ophni et Phines,' utpote 'nescientes Dominum; sed et arca Dei capta est.'[1] Non solum Levitæ captivi Babylonem fuerunt adducti, sed ipsum quoque Solymæ templum ultricibus flammis fuit consumptum.[2]

Nimirum (ut ait S. Prosper) 'sic Deus Israel peccantibus sacrorum ministris irascitur, ut etiam sacratis locis vasisque non parcat.'[3] Licet enim aurei sint calices, cum tamen vos lignei sitis, ô sacerdotes! 'non est mihi voluntas in vobis, dicit Dominus exercituum; et munus non suscipiam de manu vestra.'[4] Licet ecclesiæ sint magnificæ, quia tamen mentes vestræ sunt frigidæ, 'ne offeratis ultra sacrificium, dicit Dominus, solemnitates enim vestras odivit anima mea, et incensum abominatio est mihi.'[5]

Væ itaque illis qui ea ipsa actione tantas in iras exasperant lenitatem Numinis, qua ejus justitiam placare debuissent. 'Hos enim manet terribilis quædam exspectatio judicii, et ignis' saltem lustrici horrenda 'æmulatio.'[6] Si enim magnus ille Avila, audita morte inopina cujusdam juvenis mystæ, qui unica solum vice ad aras litaverat, attonitus exclamavit: heu! multum defert ad judicem! si unicam eamque primam et hoc ipso magis fervidam sacrificationem tam rigida olim disquisitio manet; ô Superi! quam severa, terribilis, et metuenda ratio erit reddenda pro tot, tanto cum torpore, inter meras dissipationes, præcipitatas litationes?

Igitur quicumque super Angelos cœlique Reginam evectus, et quasi Deus terrestris effectus, supremæ digni-

[1] 1 Reg. iv. 11. [2] 4 Reg. xxv. 9. [3] 'De promiss.' p. ii.
[4] Malach. i. 10. [5] Isaias i. 13, 14. [6] Heb. x. 27.

tatis culmen obtines, cave, ne tremendum illud sacrificium irreligiose peragendo, 'inducas super te maledictionem pro benedictione.'[1] Noli cum Nadab et Abiu filiis Aaron offerre ignem alienum, rubricas (ut vocant) temerarie negligendo; ne ultor 'ignis egressus à Domino devoret etiam te.'[2]

Potius sancta sancte tracta; 'oleum quippe sacræ unctionis est super te;'[3] et morem gerendo Venetorum Patriarchæ Justiniano, 'munda te compunctionis et lacrymarum lavacro: carnis lumbos castitatis funiculo succinge: devotionis affectu te compone: virtutum te orna gemmis, sicque memor Dominicæ passionis ad sanctum accedas altare, divina suscepturus mysteria.'[4]

'O Pontifex magne, JESU fili DEI,'[5] 'qui me famulum tuum nullis, suffragantibus meritis, sed immensa clementiæ tuæ largitate cœlestibus mysteriis servire tribuisti, dignum, quæso, sacris altaribus fac ministrum, ut tuæ Majestati rite merear famulari. Præsta, ut hoc tuum Sacramentum non sit mihi reatus ad pœnam, sed intercessio salutaris ad veniam; ut sit ablutio scelerum, fortitudo fragilium, et contra omnia pericula firmamentum.'[6]

Da, ut fervoris æstu et ego conflagrans cum illis Seraphinis[7] duabus alis velem faciem, summa demissione in abyssum nihili me dejiciendo: duabus velem pedes, intenso dolore commissos defectus execrando: duabus vero volem, intellectus et voluntatis exercitatione animum ad tui amorem inflammando.

[1] Gen. xvii. 12. [2] Levit. x. 1, 2. [3] Ibid. x. 7.
[4] Laur. Just. de casto connub. 24 n. 6. [5] Heb. iv. 14
[6] Ecclesia. in orationibus miss. [7] Isai. vi. 2.

Artic. V., No. 4.

Quædam puncta.

Quam triste igitur est videre ministros Dei viventis, qui ratione status ad sublissimam perfectionem tendere tenentur (nam cum his præcipue nunc mihi res est) hos, inquam, quam triste est videre, ex ipso negotiorum tumultu, a studiis, collocutione, conventiculis, manuali labore, a nugis et vanis occupationibus: imo non raro ex ipsis stragulis adhuc fumantes, animo dissipato, corde arido, sensibus incompositis, sine ulla pietatis stilla in Sancta Sanctorum tumultuarios irrumpere et eodem vix non habitu a rebus profanis, sine interposita mentis collectione, ad illa mysteria pertractanda prosilire, ad quæ circumstantes Angeli, rei majestate stupefacti, cernui contremiscunt. . . .

. . . 2°. Ad moram temporis quod attinet, 'ipsi sacrificationi' consecrandam, semihoram eidem tribuendam esse declarat piorum usus, suisque imperat parens Ignatius. Et certe hoc temporis spatium exigere summo jure videtur tum operationis majestas, tum operantis dignitas.

Nam, ô sacerdos? instrumentum es, et vicarius Christi tanquam immolatoris præcipui: amplissima legatione ad Deum pro Ecclesia fungeris: conciliatorem agis inter Numen offensum, et rebelle genus humanum. En! quem manibus tenes, universi Monarcha, Dominus tuus, et Judex est: functio, quam obis, omnium possibilium sanctissima, gravissima est: cœlorum Throni et Dominationes, qui præsentes circumstant, motus omnes censorio obtutu observant. Et interim tu profano languore, mimicis moribus, indecoris gestibus, inter continuas (ut

vocant) rubricarum violationes, formidandum hoc sacrificium ita deproperas, ac si lictores tergori, latrones capiti jamjam proximi imminerent.

O Superi! procumbunt Principatus, pavent Potestates, adorant Cherubini, deficiunt præ rei admiratione Seraphini: et eodem tempore Sacrorum minister, inter illos medius, veredaria celeritate, sine ullo pietatis indicio, ita actiones præcipitat, orationes deblaterat, tremendaque hæc mysteria tractat, ac si solum fictile præ manibus haberet Numen. Quis tam probrosam templis execrationem non detestetur!

Quid enim? an non pudor est, eadem linguæ volubilitate sacratum mystam recitare epistolas Pauli in ara, qua puer Ciceronis declamitat in schola? eadem incitatione et verborum syncope eumdem perlegere Evangelii paginas, qua alii bajulas rerum novarum pagellas? eadem sermonis agilitate ab eodem decurri symbolum, summis fidei dogmatibus plenum, qua narratur commentum inanibus fabulis fartum?

Profecto si quis illatam rustico injuriam eodem modo deprecaretur, quo talis enuntiat 'Kyrie eleison,' indignaretur is potius, quam misereretur. Si quis ab homine beneficium eadem labiorum velocitate, et quasi vocis protervia peteret, qua is orationem dominicam præcipitat, certo repulsam ferret.

Ad illud cœleste trisagion: 'Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus,' indicto cœlis silentio, illi quatuor et viginti Seniores, detractis vertice coronis, coram sedente in throno in genua procidunt, phialis aureis suum adorationis thymiana adolentes. Et interim hæc eadem verba, litans ad aram mysta, adeo festinanter conglobando accelerat, ac si Trinitatis sanctitatem Atheistis exsibilandam propinare vellet.

Vox sacerdotis altari adstantis, Psalmographo teste, de-

beret esse 'vox virtutis,'[1] latentem corde religionem prodentis, eamque in assistentes medio fervore propagantis. Verum proh dolor! non raro est proditor interni teporis, quem pariter contagioso exemplo circumstantibus afflat; est index dominantis intus juvenilis pruritus. Quid enim! an non puerile id et prætextatum quid est, puerorum instar sacrificando ludere par impar, et mutuo quasi certare, quis palmam alterutri in deproperanda liturgia præripere queat! idque agere presbyteros Altissimi, adjutores Christi, populi patres: et quidem cœlesti curia inspectante; eoque ipso tempore id agere, quo Ecclesiæ apud Deum in re summi momenti legatorum munere funguntur. Enimvero vel solis his vocibus tantus inest horror, ut rem fidei lumine perlustranti, artus stupore, animum dolore compleri necessum sit.

At dices: mundani homines ejusmodi lentulos aversantur, eorum sacra refugiunt, 'devotulos, ceri-perdas, scrupulosos' vocitant. Dandum aliquid etiam mundo est; itaque serviendum pietati propriæ, ne offendiculo sit alienæ. Verbo: singulares ne simus, qua itur, eamus; sequamur communem, qui jam invaluit, morem.

Vah! devovendum mille diris respectum humanum qui sacrilega temeritate in ipsa etiam Sancta Sanctorum, ipsas in aras impius irrepere non veretur. Ita enim si res se habet, ergo imprudenter egit S. Ignatius, suis rem divinam facturis, semihoram præscribendo. Ergo insigniter desipiunt tot excellentes prælati, hujus regulæ observationem urgendo. Ergo aperte errant tot alii virtute et scientia præstantes viri, ad altare semihoram explendo.

Sed quid dicent homines, inquis, ad podagrosam ejusmodi, elumbem, et testudineam sacrificationem? At quid

[1] Ps. lxvii. 34.

dicet Deus, aio ego, ad cursoriam ejusmodi, histrionicam præcipitemque litationem? Quid Christus olim in judicio sentiet de tot vocibus præcipitatis, actionibus indecoris, gestibus mimicis: de tot irreverentiis, evagationibus, immodestiis, tamque petulanti rubricarum neglectione?

Tuam hic fidem appello, quisquis tam immaniter ineptis; edic, an non stultitia sit, velle displicere Numini, ut placeas homini? an non insania sit, flammas lustralis rogi per illam ipsam functionem augere, qua illæ extingui debuissent, manducare sibi, et bibere judicium divinum, ut evites humanum? Vah! ipsa rei impudentia bilem movet, et silentium imperat.

Quid? quod ipsi etiam sectatores mundi veredarios ejusmodi sacrificulos, irreligiosos cursores, sacriolas mimos, et venaticos mystas potius vilipendant, teporis arguant, et impietatis condemnent, utpote qui sua scurrili festinatione hæreticis scandalo, catholicis offendiculo, Ecclesiæ probro sunt.

Itaque cum sacrificando simus 'spectaculum Deo, Angelis et hominibus,'[1] firmum concipiamus propositum huic tam sanctæ operationi semihoram accurate impendendi, et observandas in ea rubricas, certis per annum temporibus, iterato relegendi; ne fors eæ culpandâ oblivione ex animo deleantur.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE PARTICULAR EXAMEN.

Persuaded by motives drawn from reason itself and instructed by personal experience, St. Ignatius was convinced that the particular examen is as a help to perfec-

[1] 1 Cor iv. 9.

tion, the first and surest of all means. So important did he esteem it that he did not hesitate to assign to it a decided superiority even over meditation itself. The reason is, that the examen should in some manner exercise a supervision over the accomplishment of the resolutions formed during the morning meditation. A reflection on the utility of this exercise therefore will incite us to a faithful practice of it. Later on we shall study the proper method to be observed in making it in order that it may be more profitable to us.

Article I.

Of the utility of the particular examen.

It aids us efficaciously: 1. to correct our vices.

This exercise has for its end the extirpation of some particular vice or the acquisition of some particular virtue. We may judge of its importance in the work of our perfection by the extraordinary eulogiums bestowed on it by the saints.

So persuaded were St. Basil, St. Anthony, and St. Augustine that it includes the inestimable secret of the spiritual life, that they have expressly recommended it to their disciples in their rules.

At a later period, Cassian, St. Dorotheus, St. Bonaventure, and St. Bernard recommended it in like manner and transmitted it as a most precious heirloom to their religious children. But St. Ignatius of Loyola especially desired that this exercise should form, as it were, the chief occupation of the members of his Society, and it is through their ministry that he has contributed to establish the practice of it throughout almost the entire globe.

What occurred to Giezi, the disciple of the Prophet

Eliseus, is a type of the spiritual advantages to be derived from the particular examen. The King of Syria had sent emissaries to surprise and carry off the Prophet. Giezi, says the Scripture, 'rising early, saw an army round the city, and horses and chariots.'[1] Let us represent to ourselves that we are the object of a similar attack, that a multitude of vices surround us, close upon us, furiously pursue us, and quickly reduce us to extremity. But, let us 'fear not,'[2] if we are provided with the spiritual arms of the particular examen: it is 'the helmet of salvation,'[3] 'the shield of the strong,'[4] 'the sword of the Lord;'[5] with it we shall repulse the darts of our enemies, we shall triumph over their assaults, and by a victory more glorious than that of Gedeon exterminate those haughty Madianites. 'The field of the slothful man filled with nettles, the vineyard of the foolish man covered with thorns,' are, alas! but too striking illustrations of the state of our soul; for it is as a thicket covered with as many briars as there are evil tendencies springing up within it. But we must take courage and not allow ourselves to be dismayed by these obstacles. If by the aid of the examen we eradicate all these pernicious plants our heart shall soon become as 'a garden of delights,'[6] 'watered incessantly,'[7] 'as a paradise of pomegranates,' and through which the Almighty 'will diffuse' the sweetest 'perfumes'[8] of virtue.

If we groan beneath the weight of an evil habit which encompasses us as 'a great chain,'[9] and has become a second nature to us; if we are compelled to cry out with the Apostle, Oh, doleful slavery of my captive will! Alas!

[1] 4 Kings vi. 15. [2] Ibid. vi. 16. [3] Isaias lix. 17.
[4] Nahum ii. 3. [5] Judges vii. 20. [6] Joel ii. 3.
[7] Jerem. xxxi. 12. [8] Cant. iv. 13, 16. [9] Apoc. xx. 1.

'I do not that good which I will, but the evil which I hate, that I do,'[1] still, provided we be faithful in a daily scrutiny of the state of our conscience, we need entertain no apprehension, 'we shall as easily break these cords' and fetters 'as Sampson broke the bands that bound him, or as tow breaks at the approach of fire.'[2] Though our predominant passion seek to exercise its tyrannic power over us; though, like 'the great high statue' erected by Nabuchodonosor, 'the look whereof was terrible,'[3] it endeavour to affright us; though like 'a great strong tree,' it extend its gigantic branches 'in the midst'[4] of our heart; though it insult and defy us with the insolence of Goliath, still we shall not be vanquished, provided we constantly recur to the particular examen. This exercise shall be the little stone detached from the mountain which shall break this colossal statue, the axe which shall cut down this mighty tree, the victorious sling which shall overthrow the haughty giant. Yes; our victory is certain, provided we each day carefully perform this salutary exercise. It is a powerful means of success in the spiritual warfare: by it, we separate the forces of the enemy, the more easily to overwhelm and destroy them, while on the contrary we concentrate and augment our own.

There are no vices so heinous, so dangerous, or so inveterate that we may not destroy them by this means, and with the less difficulty in that we attack them separately. The striking analogy that exists between the physical and moral order furnishes us even in the history of profane wars with myriad comparisons illustrative of this truth. Alexander the Great, seeing himself arrested with his victorious troops on the banks of

[1] Rom. vii. 15. [2] Judges xvi. 9. [3] Dan. ii. 31. [4] Ibid. iv. 8.

the Euphrates, and unable for want of boats to cross this wide and rapid river, divides it into several canals and thus easily surmounts the trifling difficulties presented by each. By a similar stratagem, a man who is incapable of breaking several rods which are bound together, detaches and separates them, and no longer experiences any trouble in breaking them severally. The resistance presented by collective forces yields the moment they are divided.

The same rule justly applies here. In combating our defects one after the other we divest them of the great power they possessed of injuring us, and our soul, less restricted in its action, is inflamed with a noble and heroic ardour to pursue them unrelentingly.

In the time allotted each day to the examination, our understanding points out to us but one special vice to be avoided: this vice it accuses, reprehends, and condemns. It considers and beholds only the hideousness, malice, grievousness, and pernicious effects of this single vice, while it only admires, applauds, and counsels the practice of the opposite virtue. It diffuses such vivid light on our will, it urges it with such pious importunity, that the latter at length cedes to it the victory and resolves to shun that particular vice, to eradicate that bad habit which the understanding incessantly represents to it as an object of loathing.

Truth snatches from our favourite vice the mask which invested it with the semblance of virtue, reason despoils it of the hypocritical mantle beneath which it hid itself. Thus displayed in all its native deformity, it inspires us with a salutary horror; the deadly poison which was insinuating itself into our heart loses its activity, its influence diminishes insensibly, and all the strength lost

by this dangerous enemy is so much force gained for the spiritual warfare.

But if under pretence of accumulating our triumphs we engage our soul, which is naturally weak and frail, in several battles at a time, it will obey reluctantly and with a disheartening diffidence of success. We must confine ourselves, therefore, to proposing to it the practice of one particular virtue, in which case, stimulated by the easiness of the task, it will joyfully and confidently devote itself to its accomplishment, and with a holy audacity overcome all the opposition raised by the contrary vice.

It is evident, then, that the particular examen is so much the more potent in the correction of our faults as it augments our strength by weakening that of our adversary.

2. *It enables us to acquire virtue.*

Not only is this exercise beneficial for the correction of our bad habits, but it likewise assists the soul to attain all virtue.

In effect, the particular examen is a daily application of our understanding to persuade and inspire our will to good. Solicited thus each day to aim at and attach itself to the object which is proposed to it as most deserving of its love and ambition, our will, yielding at length to such reiterated entreaties, gives itself up zealously to the practice of good. Perseverance in this duty invariably conducts to solid virtue and sometimes to eminent sanctity, which thus becomes the fruit of the particular examen.

Another advantage of this exercise is that it leads us to a true knowledge of God and of ourselves. It gives

us a clear and intimate insight into our own inherent weakness and infirmity and the infinite goodness and mercy of God. Now this twofold knowledge is the basis of the whole spiritual life, and the foundation of our perfection; and it is by the examen, as we have just seen, that we secure it.

Taking it for granted that we are firmly resolved to undertake the great work of our salvation and to give ourselves no respite, till, like Saul, 'we are changed into other men,'[1] we must, according to the advice of the saints, make in the morning a resolution to apply ourselves during the day to fight strenuously against such a vice in particular, and to perform acts of the contrary virtue; we place our good purposes under the protection of the saints, we seal them in communion with the Blood of Jesus Christ, we take heaven to witness our engagement, and consent to experience its justice should we transgress them.

If in examining our conscience at mid-day we find we have forgotten our positive promise of fulfilling or avoiding such or such a fault, of fulfilling such a duty in particular, we immediately make an act of contrition, renew our promise, and resolve with all the fervour of our soul to observe it at least during the remainder of the day. It often happens, it is true, that reappearing in the evening before the tribunal of conscience we again find, notwithstanding the strength of our resolutions, the same faults against which we had so strongly armed ourselves.

But is not this proof of our weakness, frailty, and inconstancy obtained by the mid-day and evening examen a great advantage in itself? By discovering such numer-

[1] 1 Kings x. 6.

ous faults in detail, and comparing them with those of the previous day, we cannot fail to be filled with confusion, and to cry out in our grief: 'O God! who so ardently desirest that I should be a saint; but a few minutes since, "I resolved and swore to keep Thy justifications,"[1] and in these brief moments "I have" repeatedly "forgotten the holy resolutions I proposed to myself.' I have imitated Peter, who thrice on the same night denied his Divine Master, whom he had just promised to follow "to prison and to death."[2] My will "changeth as the moon,"[3] "it cometh forth like the flower" in the morning, is then destroyed "and fleeth as a shadow,"[4] changing perpetually.

What a practical knowledge of ourselves such an avowal indicates, and how faithfully the examen, like a polished mirror, reflects the genuine expression of our impotency and nothingness! This salutary exercise likewise teaches us to adore the 'riches of the goodness,'[5] mercy, love, and patience of God. We there recognise His infinite clemency which dissimulates our numberless offences; which never wearies, notwithstanding our reiterated sins; which, far from condemning or rejecting us, indulgently bears with us, recalls us from our wanderings, raises us from our falls, receives us as His children, and clasping us lovingly to His paternal bosom, restores us to life and vigour.

From this knowledge of God and ourselves, as from an exhaustless source whose principle is in heaven, flow on the one side copious streams of the vivifying waters of profound humility of heart, perfect distrust of our own strength, an intimate conviction of our instability in

[1] Ps. cxviii. 6. [2] Luke xxii. 33. [3] Eccli. xxvii. 12.
[4] Job xiv. 2. [5] Rom. ii. 4.

good and utter self-contempt; on the other, a boundless confidence in God, based on the consideration of His goodness, whose tender solicitude elevates our soul, fortifies our hope, and consolingly reminds us that 'those who hope in the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall take wings as eagles, they shall run' to the goal of perfection, 'and not be weary, they shall walk' in the path of virtue 'and not faint.'[1]

By the practice of the particular examen we may also acquire in a short time the inestimable gift of purity of heart, reckoned by Jesus Christ amongst the beatitudes, 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.'[2] Now, what myriad blessings do we not receive with purity of heart? A pure soul is 'a spotless mirror,'[3] wherein all the rays of grace concentrate; an invariably calm 'sea, of glass, like to crystal,'[4] 'a pearl of great price,'[5] with which we purchase the 'kingdom of God,' which consists in 'justice and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.'[6] In a word, the pure of heart are those 'blessed ones, who alone' by a glorious privilege are invited to the 'nuptials of the Lamb,'[7] and who alone also 'follow Him whithersoever He goeth, for they are without spot before the throne of God.'[8]

Lastly, this exercise is, by excellence, the abridged means of gaining perfection; for all the virtues being, as it were, sisters, and consequently inseparable, by contracting the habit of one we obtain them all. The work of our perfection is a chain formed of several links, one of which being taken in the hand, we may draw the whole towards us. This weapon of the particular examen, directing all its attacks against one particular

[1] Isaias xl. 31. [2] Matt. v. 8. [3] Wisd. vii. 26. [4] Apoc. iv. 6.
[5] Matt. xiii. 45. [6] Rom. xiv. 17. [7] Apoc. xix. 9. [8] Ibid. xiv. 4, 5.

defect, is a 'two-edged sword,'[1] 'reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit of the joints also and the marrow,'[2] which extirpates even the finest and innermost filaments of our bad habits. It is likewise a most precious gift of God, since it is the most effectual means of eradicating our vices. But you will say: 'Why combat only one of my vices? I will attack and destroy them all simultaneously and without delay, they shall all perish together beneath my hand.' Rash words! Are you, then, ignorant that the advice addressed by Moses to Israel is also applicable to us? 'Thou wilt not be able to destroy thy enemies altogether, but by little and little, and by degrees;'[3] 'thou art not able to withstand or fight against them,'[4] 'because these nations are greater and stronger than thou.'[5] So it is with our spiritual enemies; never can we vanquish or even combat them so long as we leave them united. Unless we have the prudence to separate their forces, never shall we be victorious over them; and after long and fruitless efforts we will be compelled to exclaim with the disciples: 'we have laboured all night and have taken nothing.'[6]

Yes, O my God! Thou who beholdest my heart, I am firmly resolved for the remainder of my life to employ each day so easy and efficacious a method for acquiring perfection. The particular examen shall be 'the preservative of my fervour, my protector against the noon-day devil,' and my guarantee against my infidelities; it 'shall be a lamp to my eyes,' the healing balm that 'bestoweth health, life, and blessing'[7]—the health of the soul, the life of grace, and the benediction of glory.

[1] Apoc. i. 16. [2] Heb. iv. 12. [3] Deut. vii. 22.
[4] 1 Kings xvii 33 [5] Deut. xi. 23. [6] Luke v. 5.
[7] Eccli. xxxiv. 19.

Article II.

Of the practice of the particular examen.

1. *The Matter.*

The particular examen must be made with order, and according to the wants of our soul.

1. Our first care should be to study our principal defect, that which is the origin and source of our other vices, and the root whence they derive their nutriment; that consequently which inflicts most damage on our soul, opposes the greatest obstacle to our perfection, lays snares for us which are so much the more to be dreaded in that they are occult, and which, in fine, leads us to the most proximate danger of mortal sin by smoothing the way to it.

2. However, should we not be under the dominion of any passion, or tyrannized over by any bad habit, we should examine with what fidelity we perform our spiritual exercises, such as meditation, lecture, examen of conscience; what guard we keep over the senses; how often in the day and with what fervour we visit the Blessed Sacrament; what is our love and reverence for the adorable mysteries of our religion; whether we do not approach them with tepidity; what are our most habitual temptations; what the purity of intention with which we perform our ordinary actions; whether we do not allow ourselves to be too much engrossed by exterior things, so as to be but seldom interiorly recollected and still more rarely united to God.

3. When we have completely corrected all that is faulty in these points, we must commence to apply ourselves to the practice of the virtue in which we are most

deficient and of which we believe ourselves to stand in need. Following the example of Jeremias, who was appointed not merely to 'root up and pull down and to waste and destroy, but also to build and to plant,'[1] we must not only eradicate our sinful passions, but we must likewise assiduously cultivate the virtues of humility, charity, and purity, as flowers most charming in the eyes of the heavenly Bridegroom.

For the rest, this application to the practice of virtue is in itself a pleasing and efficacious remedy against our vices. It is towards the destruction of some special defect or the acquisition of some particular virtue, therefore, that our examen should always tend.

2. *Important advice concerning the examen.*

Let us attack before all our other defects that which is most displeasing to our neighbour and is likely to be most prejudicial to him or be to him an occasion of sin. In failing in charity we rarely fall alone; we generally drag others with us: consequently, it is of the greatest importance to direct our first efforts against such a vice.

2. Nevertheless, we must not occupy ourselves solely with our exterior faults and devote all the time of the examen to this object; for since 'all the glory of the king's daughter'—that is to say, of the soul—'is within,'[2] it follows as a matter of course that we should also pay great attention to what concerns our interior movements in order to render them subservient to the principles of virtue and to quell the revolt of our evil desires. These being once well regulated, we shall no longer manifest these inequalities of temper and conduct

[1] Jerem. i. 10. [2] Ps. xliv. 14.

so painful to our neighbour, but shall acquire habits of meekness, kindness, and unalterable charity.

3. We often derive only an indifferent advantage from the examen, on account of not knowing where precisely to apply the remedy to the evil which requires to be cured. We must, like a skilful physician, study the source of our spiritual malady and then direct our concentrated efforts against it alone, sparing neither pains nor fatigue in subduing it. For if we cut off the strongest branches of a tree without hewing down the stem, the trunk, divested of the old boughs, will push up new shoots whose destructive shade, owing to the more abundant supply of sap, will extend still farther. Let us then unsparingly apply the axe to the very root of the bad tree, and its branches, deprived of their nutriment, shall wither and die; let us tear the cockle from the field of our heart and it shall perish, nor shall its seed mix with the good grain. The King of Syria being about to give battle to Achab, 'commanded the captains of his cavalry, saying: 'Fight not with the small or great, but with the King of Israel only.'[1] He was convinced that the loss of the head would inevitably lead to the defeat of the remainder of the army. Imitating the prudent behaviour of this prince, let us destroy our predominant defect, and we will achieve an easy victory over our other vices, whose ruin will complete our triumph.

An able commander exercises special vigilance in guarding the weakest point of a place intrusted to him from an invading foe: let us with equal foresight defend the weakest part of our soul; let us examine what bad habit has struck the deepest roots in our soul, what passion exercises most tyranny over us, and is therefore

[1] 2 Paralip. xviii. 30.

most to be dreaded; and having recognised it, let us unite all our forces to give battle to this enemy alone.

4. I say this sole enemy, because it is essential to make the examen on only one subject at a time. The collection of the sun's rays on the focus of a mirror intensifies their heat and increases the fervency with which they consume the inflammable materials exposed to their action. So it is that in concentrating all the energies of our soul against one single defect we insure to ourselves a prompt and complete victory over it. It is even advisable to divide the vice we are fighting against and not attempt the correction of all its ramifications at the same time. The forces of our adversary shall thus be more enfeebled, and we shall more easily attain the end of our designs.

5. We must not lightly change the subject of our particular examen. Many derive but little profit from this exercise because they pass with inconstancy and levity from one object to another, they attack their principal enemy only by impulses and not with serious and persevering efforts: they weary of these fruitless attempts, and finally relinquish the pursuit of a success which they know not how to obtain. 'They are always studying and never attaining to the knowledge of the truth.'[1] They are always armed yet never win a victory. It is in this especially that we must persevere, that we must fortify our heart against the vicissitudes of war. Should we be defeated and cast down, starting to our feet once more, we must return to the charge with more courage than before, saying with the Royal Prophet: 'I will pursue my enemies and overtake them; I will not turn again till I have destroyed them.'[2] No, we must

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 7. [2] Ps. xvii. 38.

grant no truce to our adversary nor allow ourselves any repose till we have so weakened this furious hydra, as to be able, without an effort, and by a mere act of volition, to overthrow it again the moment it presumes to lift its head.

We must not be surprised, however, if we very rarely, if ever, succeed in completely conquering our defects: they are monsters which revive from their own ashes, and which we are unable to annihilate of ourselves. All that is required of us, therefore, is to repress and reduce them to an inability to injure us in the perfect discharge of our obligations. This is the extent of the victory we are bound to gain over them.

It is sometimes well, according to the circumstances and dispositions of our soul, to interrupt the principal matter of our examen for a short time, and replace it by another, lest we fall into discouragement; but solely on the condition of resuming the first subject at the end of some weeks, when we have sufficiently recruited our strength to renew the war against our enemy with greater vigour.

6. In order the more speedily to overthrow the strongest rampart of our predominant passion, we must attack it unrelentingly with the arms of prayer and mortification. 'Labour,' says Cassian, 'to overcome the defect against which you have declared war by the austerity of your fasts: let your sighs, vigils, meditations, continual prayers and tears, ascend incessantly to God, begging of Him the grace to conquer it.'

But it is not sufficient that we reflect on the motives that exist for combating such a vice in particular, during meditation and spiritual reading: our heart should frequently reiterate its supplications to God during the day,

saying fervently: 'Lord, grant me chastity, grant me obedience, grant me charity.' We must also address our humble petitions to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, earnestly imploring of Him the needful grace. Lastly, to ensure the grant of our petition, let us beg the intercession of the saints, but above all that of our Immaculate Mother, whom we should honour with a special devotion: for without their aid our labours would in all probability prove futile and unavailing. A modest self-distrust should accompany our prayers if we would have them pierce the clouds, ascend to heaven, and deserve to be offered by our angel guardian 'in a golden censer on the golden altar which is before the throne of God.'[1] 'They that trust in their own strength and glory in the multitude of their riches,'[2] are the victims of a cruel illusion. We must likewise unite corporal mortifications, such as fasts, disciplines, hair-cloth, and other similar practices, to our supplications. This will insure their efficacy, as Daniel experienced when he merited to hear from the lips of the angel: because, 'thou didst set thy heart to understand, to afflict thyself in the sight of thy God, thy words have been heard.'

3. *The manner in which we should make the particular examen.*

We shall end this chapter by the following rules concerning the order to be observed in the examen.

First rule.—We must commence the spiritual warfare by a firm and generous resolution to correct ourselves; for 'the strength of our resolution shall be the measure of our progress,' says T. A'Kempis. If it is weak our advancement shall be but slow, we shall drag ourselves

[1] Apoc. viii. 3. [2] Ps. xlviii. 7. [3] Dan. x. 12.

on painfully in the paths of virtue. 'What!' adds the 'Imitation,' 'if he who takes the strongest resolutions often relaxes, what shall he do who only forms them from time to time, or makes only weak ones?'[1] Soon his tepid and slothful will shall forget its promises, or even, discouraged by the obstacles, completely renounce them. Let us make our resolution in the morning and renew it again at noon.

We must avoid ever forming any resolution the accomplishment of which should extend to our whole life, as the mere idea of being bound to any practice for a long succession of years might terrify us and make us despair of our amendment: it is sufficient, then, each time we renew our good resolution, to limit the obligation of it to half a day. The brevity of such an engagement will inspire us with courage to persevere with constancy and fervour in the good we have begun. The little fruit drawn by several from the examen is, without doubt, owing to their not attaching sufficient importance to forming only such resolutions as are firm.

Second rule.—We must find means to accomplish our resolutions several times in the day; but for that end it is imperative on us to foster it in our heart, recall it to mind from time to time, discreetly, however, and without anxiety; we must prudently foresee all the opportunities of reducing it to practice, anticipate and avoid the temptations to fail in it, recall to mind the motives which inspired us to make it, and joyfully embrace every occasion that presents itself of practising the virtue opposed to the vice which we are fighting against. If, despite these precautions, it happen that we 'strike our foot against some stone'[2] and fall, let us gently lay our

[1] Imit. b. i. c. 19. [2] Ps. xc. 12.

hand upon our heart, and, repenting of our fault, renew our engagement of being more faithful henceforward.

Third and last rule.—We must examine our conscience twice a day, in order to review and carefully scrutinise our actions, to see if we have fulfilled the particular resolution taken at the morning meditation. The examen over, we must excite ourselves to regret for our faults, renew our good purpose of correcting them, and mark, by so many dots on a little book, prepared expressly for this purpose, the number of our infractions. In this way it will be easy for us in the evening to compare the dots we have marked since noon with those of the morning, and in like manner the dots of the present day with those of yesterday, and the dots of the actual week with those of the preceding. This contrast will teach us whether we advance or unfortunately remain stationary in the spiritual life.

What we recommend regarding the particular examen is no new doctrine, it is that of the saints, whose testimony we have already cited, and from whom we have borrowed it. Those illustrious personages have recommended this exercise to their disciples as a sovereign remedy against all the diseases of the soul; they have prescribed it in their rules and bequeathed it as an inestimable inheritance to their spiritual children. How can we refrain from admiring in this the prudence of their zeal? The particular examen is a mute monitor, an assiduous censor of our life, a witness which is constantly beside us, which hourly demands an account of our actions, admonishes us of our obligations, and reprehends us for our faults. It is the precious talent which 'the master in setting out for a distant country has confided to us,'[1] charging us to turn

[1] Matt. xxv. 14.

it to account; a talent which will enable us to amass rich treasures of grace and virtue, unless we neglect to trade therewith. It is the probatic well of Jerusalem, wherein not alone 'he who goes down first after the water is moved, may be cured,' but whoever purifies himself there at any time, 'and whatever may be his disease,'[1] provided only he be willing to employ this remedy unflinchingly.

Oh! how severe and awful an account shall not he have to render 'who, like the wild ass's colt, thinketh himself born free;'[2] who hearkeneth not to the voice and receiveth not the discipline'[3] of this faithful monitor; who 'goes to dig a hole in the ground to hide his talent in,'[4] and leaves it there idle; who, 'sick for thirty-eight years,'[5] remains seated at the source of salvation, ever the victim of the same infirmity, because he foolishly neglects to recur to so infallible and easy a means of cure!

Unhappy we! one day countless bankers and merchants, now engaged in advancing their fortune, shall arise from the east and the west and from the most remote regions; they shall arise, I say, with their account-books, to which their daily losses and gains are consigned with the strictest exactitude, and shall condemn our indifference regarding our spiritual traffic.

Many of the saints shall also arise, holding in their hands the faithful journal of their examen, the practice of which has conducted them to so high a degree of sanctity and glory; they shall arise and overwhelm us with shame for our sloth in acquitting ourselves of this duty.

The demon himself shall arise, and displaying before us so many reams of paper covered by us during life with useless writing, shall reproach us with not having

[1] John v. 3. [2] Job xi. 12. [3] Soph. iii. 2.
[4] Matt. xxv. 18. [5] John iii. 5.

dedicated one sheet to so all-important a duty as our examen: thus shall he confound our indolence.

Alas! what shall be our humiliation when we see that those merchants have done more for a little money than we have done for God? That we have wasted so much paper in worthless writing, without having consecrated one page to the noting down of our faults? That our friends, our penitents, our pupils, have attained to such perfection, conquered such vices, acquired such virtues by means of this exercise? When we perceive that we might have easily reaped the same benefits from it; that we had the means in our hands; that nothing prevented, whilst everything co-operated thereto; that we were wont to exhort others to make it; and yet, oh, the folly! we have neglected it ourselves, we have even regarded it with contempt as a childish pastime, all very well for novices! What shall be our shame when we have to admit that, after several years spent in religion, we have not corrected one fault or acquired one virtue by the aid of this holy practice? that our hair has blanched, we have reached the term of life, as imperfect, nay, perhaps, more vicious than we were in our youth? What esteem shall we set on the examen? What remorse shall we not experience for having forgotten it? Let us now, therefore, faithfully accomplish an exercise, the omission of which later on must cost us such remorse, whilst the fulfilment of it will be fraught with consolation.

O illustrious St. Ignatius! enlightened master in the ways of perfection, may thy voice resound in my ears. From the sublime throne of glory, which thou dost occupy, imprint indelibly on my heart these words of Solomon: 'My child, "keep my rule" of the particular examen "as the apple of thine eye: bind it upon thy

fingers; write it on the tables of thy heart, and thou shalt live."'[1]

Yes, great Saint, it shall be so. 'I will put' the instructions thou hast given me, concerning this holy exercise, 'around my neck; they shall accompany me when I walk, they shall be with me when I sleep, and I shall converse with them when I walk, because thy commandment is a lamp and a bright light, which' directs us in the path of virtue, and 'thy doctrine is the way of life.'[2]

Henceforth, therefore, 'may that day perish' on which I shall omit the particular examen; 'let it not be counted in the days of the year, let it be wrapped in bitterness, and let a darksome whirlwind seize upon that night,'[3] at the commencement of which I shall deem the noting down of my faults as a thing of trivial consequence; 'let not the light shine' upon the week which I shall have neglected to compare with the preceding one, and let the month in which I have been guilty of a similar omission 'be covered with darkness, and with the shadow of death.' Yes, my resolution is taken: never again will I allow a single day to pass without marking down my faults. I will imitate the geometrician, who, by the aid of a number of points, contrives to find the centre whence proceeds the radius ending at the circumference of the circle, the symbol of a happy eternity.

[1] Prov. vii. 2. [2] Prov. vi. 23. [3] Job iii. 3 and fol.

(Note of French translator.) The following is St. Ignatius' method of making the particular examen: He desires that the moment we get up in the morning we recall to mind the vice or defect we propose to combat during the day. At noon we examine how often we have fallen into this defect since morning, and mark the number of falls by a corresponding number of dots on the first line conformable to that of the model here given. In the evening we make a similar survey of our conscience for the second part of the day, and mark the number of failings on a second line, in order to compare both lines, and see

CHAPTER VI.

OF THE SPIRITUAL RETREAT OF THREE DAYS.

MEDITATION is to the soul what fuel is to the fire, what the weights are to the clock. If we cease to supply fire with its aliment, it ceases to give out heat and flame; if

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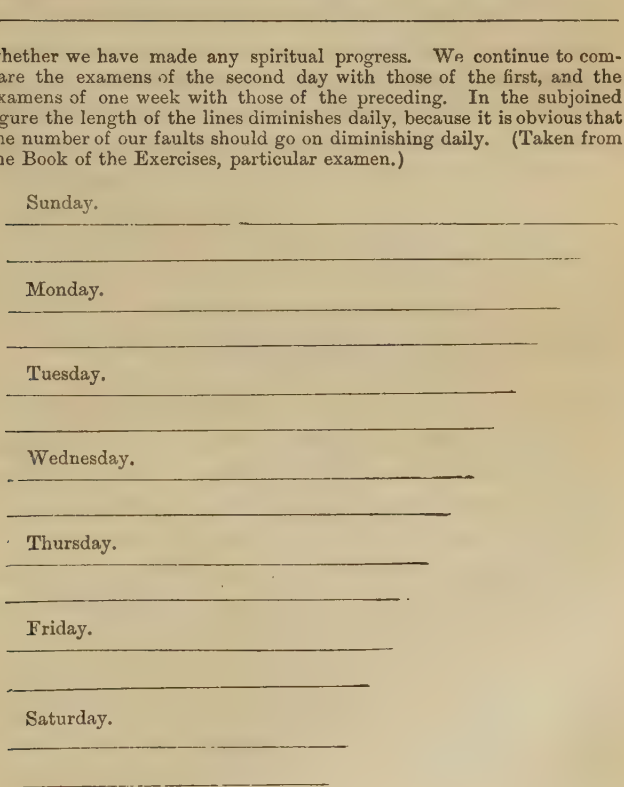
whether we have made any spiritual progress. We continue to compare the examens of the second day with those of the first, and the examens of one week with those of the preceding. In the subjoined figure the length of the lines diminishes daily, because it is obvious that the number of our faults should go on diminishing daily. (Taken from the Book of the Exercises, particular examen.)



we neglect to wind the clock, the needle necessarily stops and ceases to indicate the hours. So, in like manner, unless our fervour be reanimated from time to time in retreat by longer meditations and more frequent communion with God, it will soon grow cold, nay, degenerate into mortal languor, since, owing to our natural propension to evil, our heart constantly gravitates towards the earth. Hence it is that persons desirous of perfection are wont, besides the great retreats, to consecrate at least three days twice a year to the renovation of the interior spirit. This salutary practice, which is one of the rules of our Society, sustains and preserves devotion, assists us to repair our forces should they have suffered any diminution in virtue. We shall demonstrate the necessity and advantages of this retreat in the following considerations, and shall end by explaining the most appropriate method of making it.

Article I.

Of the necessity of retreat.

First proof.—The present state of our soul. This habitual disgust for heavenly things, this continual effusion of our soul on exterior objects, this inveterate tepidity in meditation, this habitual imperfection in the accomplishment of our daily actions, the dangerous and frequent temptations (too deliberate, perhaps, in their cause), the absolute or nearly absolute absence of fear of committing sin, evince clearly that we entertain less horror of venial transgressions, are familiarized with offending God, and have every reason to apprehend being already on the verge of mortal sin.

The number and violence of our yet unsubdued

passions which frustrate the designs of Providence upon us: so many vicious and deep-rooted habits uncorrected, and which still 'keep us fast bound with a chain of iron:' so many good works omitted, which were obligatory or to which grace solicited us, so many faults committed in the holy land, the very sanctuary of religion, amid the angels of the earth: the too well-founded doubt and too legitimate uneasiness as to whether we are in a state of grace, whether we have faithfully fulfilled all the duties of our charge, or whether we have not neglected even the most important; whether the infractions of our vows and rules have not been mortal; whether our confessions have always been accompanied with the requisite dispositions of integrity, contrition, firm purpose of amendment, etc. Yes, all these are so many more than sufficient proofs that we are in greater danger than we imagined of losing not only our vocation, but our soul; consequently, that it is most incumbent on us to have recourse to retreat to recover our peace of conscience and anticipate and avert, by the reformation of our lives, the misfortunes which menace us.

Second proof.—The neglect of our duties. The rules of the institute we have embraced require that we be men of profound humility, unalterable patience, heroic obedience, continual mortification, assiduity and fervour in prayer, living models of virtue, capable of inspiring a horror of vice and love of virtue, by the mere prestige of our presence. But, woe to us! we are still impatient, arrogant, incorrigible, passionate, voluntary slaves of sensuality, strangers to piety, subject to our passions, the sport of self-love: so that possibly the irregularity of our lives renders us a subject of scandal to seculars, of affliction to those with whom we live, of humiliation to the

Order of which we are members, and of grief to the Church.

The excellence of our vocation demands that we be dead to self, that we live for God alone and the promotion of His glory, and for our neighbour by labouring for the salvation of souls, without any desire of self-complacency. But, alas! what have we done up to the present? What have we suffered for God or for our neighbour? Have we prevented a single mortal sin? Have we snatched one soul from hell or conducted it heavenward? To what degree of perfection have we attained? Is it not true that the old man still survives in us, and holds the empire over our reason? How often have we not sacrificed the glory and interest of God to the desire of some vain honour, a culpable human respect? How often have we preferred our advancement, temporal advantage, or sensual gratification, to the salvation of souls? Perhaps some may even be able to upbraid us with being the cause of their ruin? Ah! were a sudden death to befall us to-day, what would be our fate? This thought fills us with dismay, and yet we have the temerity, religious as we are, to live in a state in which we would be afraid to die! Oh! how imperative it is on us to regulate, in anticipation, the account of our soul in retreat.

Third proof.—The abuse of grace. Not alone should we be holy on account of the excellence of our vocation, but we could likewise easily become so, owing to the helps and graces we receive. So great is the efficacy of the adorable Eucharist, that one single communion, if well made, would suffice to raise us to sublime sanctity; and, nevertheless, after having been thousands of times seated at the Lord's Table, we are still, perhaps, the slaves of our evil habits.

Confession is a salutary bath, wherein the soul purifies itself from its stains, a heavenly balm, which heals all our wounds, a perfect antidote against the poison of sin. And yet, after so frequent an avowal of our faults, we still approach the sacred tribunal with an invariable formula of the same infidelities, the same iniquities, and scarcely have we left the confessional ere we relapse into the habitual offences, which a moment since we promised to renounce; so that very frequently we leave the minister of God without having tranquillised our conscience.

The annual retreats, so generally practised by devout souls, are means of the first order for the speedy attainment of sanctity. But what fruit have we derived from them, unless it be some sheets of paper, covered with our resolutions, and preserved by us as so many testimonies of our sloth in their fulfilment. Thus, without foresight for the future, indifferent concerning our advancement, reckless about our eternal destiny, oblivious of our duties, neglectful of the divine inspirations, we spend entire months and years in tepidity and on the utmost confines of mortal sin. Meantime, the thread of grace wastes away insensibly and finally snaps, the heavenly light gradually becomes dimmed, holy inspirations become less urgent, the bowels of divine mercy contract, the wrath of its justice is enkindled, death approaches with uplifted scythe: this year, perhaps, we shall appear before the judgment-seat of God, to render an account of our persistent frustration of the blessings of our vocation, time, talents, and the other graces conferred upon us.

Ah! when the Sovereign Judge shall unseal the book of our conscience, and when with His light, a thousand times more piercing than that of the sun at its meridian, 'He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and

will manifest the counsels of hearts[1]; then those false principles, those erroneous maxims concerning the religious life, by which we now suffer ourselves to be deluded, shall vanish as a faint glimmer before the funereal lamp: then shall the mask be torn away, depicting to us in all their enormity our secret sins and those we have occasioned in others, and of which we did not even suspect ourselves guilty; then shall we confess the blindness of our self-love, which regarded as venial sins what were, alas! too really mortal.

Shall we now presume to deny the necessity we are under of seriously devoting, at least, a day or two to the regulation of the accounts of our life, and in laying the foundations of a solid virtue? Great God! dissipate, we beseech Thee, by the brightness of Thy light, the darkness which obscures my mental vision, that, recognising the danger which menaces me, I may recoil before the abyss which yawns beneath my feet, and bring to retreat all the fervour with which I shall desire to have made it at the hour of death.

Article II.

Of the utility of retreat.

First proof.—The countless graces we derive from it for ourselves.

It is certain that in retreat we receive numberless and extraordinary graces. The holy inspirations, the heavenly light, the efficacious impulses to good, the interior movements of a victorious grace, more exalted views of the eternal truths and of the designs of God in our regard, are so many signal favours with which the goodness of God deigns to enrich those who make retreat

[1] 1 Cor. iv. 5.

well: while, on the contrary, those who neglect or perform it carelessly, forfeit the right to those spiritual advantages, and expose themselves to the privation of numberless merits in this life and of so many degrees of glory in the other. Were the veil withdrawn from our eyes, were it permitted us to read the impenetrable secrets of Providence, we would probably behold a profusion of spiritual helps prepared for us, following each other consecutively, and emanating from the graces attached to a good retreat; but which shall be withheld from us should we omit or perform it precipitately or coldly. In point of fact, God may possibly have decreed to attach some special grace, some high degree of virtue, to the good dispositions in which we spend these days of salvation, favours which we shall never obtain should we allow so auspicious an opportunity to pass.

If, as the price of a fervent retreat, we were promised an honourable employment, a lucrative post, anything, in fact, capable of flattering our pride or self-love; were we assured of the cure of a virulent disease or complete justification from an unjust calumny, how fervently and faithfully would we not devote those days to pious reflections?

Now, God promises us on the same condition blessings which are infinite, inestimable, and eternal. He promises to heal the mortal languor of our soul and to shield us from the overwhelming confusion which awaits the unfaithful servants on the last day. How great, then, would be our folly were we, religious as we are, insensible to such rewards, while we manifest such anxiety and ardour for temporal advantages.

O religious! numbers of your brethren are accustomed to win for themselves the most precious treasures by

retreat; many seculars would attain to eminent sanctity were that assistance granted to them. What reply will you make on the last day, when, accusing you with your indifference, they will reproach you for your abuse of so great a grace? What answer will you give to the Sovereign Judge Himself?

Beware, lest, having, like the barren fig-tree, disappointed the cares of the Father of the family, you also incur the same anathema. History furnishes us with thousands of examples of a similar chastisement. You are not superior to others. Take heed, then, for God is not mocked with impunity. He who despises His mercy exasperates His justice, and he who shuts his eyes to the light shall be enveloped in the dark whirlwinds of His wrath.

Thou art 'terrible,' Lord, 'in Thy counsels over the sons of men.'[1] How should I not fear lest I find 'my ruin'[2] in this retreat, where I ought to find the fountain of life? But no, assisted by Thy grace, I will apply myself seriously to this duty, 'for I am afraid of Thy judgments,'[3] 'and he that feareth neglecteth nothing.'[4]

Second proof.—The graces we obtain there for others.

It may be that as the reward of this retreat, if well made, God will choose us as co-operators in some important work for His glory; that He will grant us the conversion of some great sinners, who would otherwise have continued in the ways of iniquity; or else the gift of a singular unction in the sacred tribunal and in our exhortations to virtue.

God, in the adorable dispositions of His wisdom, ordinarily attaches the salvation of souls to certain circumstances of time, means, place, and especially to

[1] Ps. lxv. 5. [2] Luke ii. 34. [3] Ps. cxviii. 120. [4] Eccli. vii. 19.

persons who alone are destined to operate the salvation of such souls in particular.

Thus it seems that Divine Providence had reserved for St. Francis Xavier alone the work of the conversion of Japan, which, but for him, might never have been effected; but if, instead of performing fervently the exercises of the retreat which St. Ignatius induced him to make, and of laying in it the foundations of solid virtue, he had acquitted himself carelessly of them, would he now possess the glory of being the apostle of so many provinces? Would those remote regions have been converted to the faith? Let us study the history of the Church; how often has not God, on account of the sanctity of His ministers, of the Vincent Ferrers, the Anthony of Paduas, the Francis Regis', and a host of others, poured forth copious and efficacious graces on their auditors, of which they would have been deprived had these evangelical preachers been less eminently holy?

If the eternal salvation of children so far depends on the piety of their parents that they are often deprived of the means of receiving the grace of baptism, through the fault of the latter, is it not likewise possible that the eternal happiness of countless souls may be attached by an invisible bond to the perfection of others?

Now, are not the excellence of our vocation, the talents we have received, the numberless means with which God has furnished us, so many cogent reasons for believing that Divine Providence desires that on our perfection should depend the salvation of many souls, who shall never enter heaven unless we labour faithfully for our sanctification, and also that this short retreat is, perhaps, the decisive moment in which the Almighty has resolved

to grant us, provided we oppose no obstacles, the graces necessary for the accomplishment of His designs of mercy towards us.

What reproaches must we then expect, if we do not avail ourselves of these holy exercises to correct the disorder of our lives, and if we render ourselves incapable of being made the instruments of God to be employed for the salvation of our brethren, in the time that He has prescribed? What regret shall we not experience later on if, spending these days of grace in tepidity, we compel the God of Charity to reject us, to choose in our place, for the conversion of sinners, another assistant, another minister more deserving? Finally, what a severe account shall we not have to render should souls, whose salvation we ought to have wrought, be lost because we shall not have repressed our evil desires, resisted sensual gratifications and the seductions of the flesh, or conquered vainglory and human respect?

What awful chastisements will not so many wretched souls, lost through our fault, the Blood of Jesus Christ rendered abortive in their behalf by our neglect, their Angel Guardian, whose cares we have frustrated by our tepidity, invoke against us? Assuredly, should such motives fail to determine us to perform these holy exercises with fervour, with the firm resolution to devote ourselves irrevocably to the practice of virtue, we are unworthy to continue members of a religious order, one of the chief ends of which is to labour for the salvation of our neighbour.

O God! full of zeal for our souls, I will from this moment cease to resist Thee. I resolve to consecrate, at least, some days to redeem the loss of so many years. In compliance with the advice of Thy Prophet, 'I will enter

into my chamber; I will shut its doors upon me, and I will hide myself for a moment.'[1] I will there reanimate the fire of devotion, in order to be able to inflame others therewith, and preserve them 'from everlasting burning.'[2] Woe to me! if, by my tepidity in retreat, I should become an occasion of ruin to my neighbour. Alas! Thy justice will rigorously require of me 'soul for soul;'[3] it will force me to render an account of the Blood of Jesus Christ shed in vain.

Third proof.—The ineffable consolations we draw thence.

It will one day be a great consolation to us to have made our retreat with care; and we shall not have to apprehend the threats denounced against those who perform the exercises slothfully. In truth, 'unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required: and to whom they have committed much, of him they will demand the more.'[4] The severity of our account will increase, in proportion to the measure of the graces that shall have been granted to us. He that has received five talents must gain other five, or else he shall be treated as a 'slothful servant.'[5] A retreat is a new grace, and the truths proposed therein are new talents: woe to us, then, if we neglect to profit by and trade with these talents; how great shall be our consternation at the hour of death! but, on the contrary, if we make it with fervour, oh! with what joy will not the remembrance of our fidelity fill us!

Were the blessing of a retreat granted to such or such of my old friends, who are now suffering in purgatory, and that too, perhaps, for having followed the exercises without zeal or piety, with what eagerness, what earnest-

[1] Isaias xxvi. 20. [2] Ibid. xxxiii. 14. [3] Exod. xxi. 23.
[4] Luke xii. 48. [5] Matt. xxv. 26.

ness, would they not endeavour to profit by it! but how deeply do they not now deplore the having abused so favourable an opportunity!

Perhaps we ourselves, and that sooner than we imagine, shall one day bewail in these expiatory flames the having passed these 'days of salvation'[1] in tepidity. We richly merit chastisement, therefore, should we not now do what we shall then so bitterly neglect having omitted. Who can tell whether 'the axe is not already laid to the root of the tree?'[2] It may be that this is the last retreat that shall be granted to us, since an unexpected death has already cut off many of those who assisted at these retreats last summer or last winter, and the vigour of whose constitutions seemed to promise an advanced old age. If we are wise, let us make the present retreat with fervour, that it may one day be a source of consolation instead of remorse to us.

Lord, permit not that this grace, which has already been, and shall continue to be, so powerful a means of perfection to so many others, should become for me the source of greater infidelity, or that I should drink death where others have found the source of life. Grant, O my God, that I may at length live a little for Thee, I who till now have lived for the world; and that I may at least devote some days to my soul, after having squandered months and years in pampering my body; for, perhaps, no more time shall remain to me if I lose these days of grace that are offered to me.

My resolution is taken: I will employ the time of this retreat in attending, with all the earnestness of which I am capable, to my one only important business. I am determined 'to think upon the days of old and the

[1] 2 Cor. vi. 2. [2] Luke iii. 9.

eternal years'[1] alone. I am ready to do Thy holy will in all things as far as I shall know it: 'Show me Thy ways, therefore, O Lord, and teach me Thy paths:'[2] teach me Thy will, 'that I may know my end;'[3] grant me the grace to will what Thou willest and the strength necessary for its accomplishment.

Article III.

Advice concerning the manner of making the retreat with fruit.

If we would follow the spiritual exercises with profit and by our docility to the voice of grace labour efficaciously for the amendment of our lives, let us carefully observe the following advice concerning the time and method of making retreat:

1. *The time in which we should make the retreat.*

The time most profitable for making retreat is—1, when we feel ourselves interiorly attracted thereto, and that we seem to hear, in our hearts, the sweet invitation of the Heavenly Bridegroom: 'Arise, my dove, come into the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall;'[4] 'come apart into a desert place, and rest a little.'[5] Let us not fail to correspond promptly to this heavenly inspiration, and let us reply with the docility of Samuel, 'Here I am: for Thou calledst me;'[6] 'lead me in the eternal way;'[7] 'I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou shalt go.'[8]

These inspirations are a certain sign that Divine Providence has special designs concerning the retreat to

[1] Ps. lxxvi. 6. [2] Ibid. xxiv. 4. [3] Ibid. xxxviii. 5.
[4] Cant. ii. 14. [5] Mark vi. 31. [6] 1 Kings iii. 9.
[7] Ps. cxxxviii. 24. [8] Matt. viii. 19.

which it interiorly solicits us and destines great graces for us in it. How dangerous it would be for us to thwart its designs!

God also manifests His will to us, in this matter, when our superior or director prescribes or advises retreat for us; whether in this they propose to themselves the fulfilment of a point of our rule, or that they are actuated in this particular circumstance by the knowledge they possess of our spiritual wants.

2. When there is question of our choosing a state of life, beginning a new kind of life, entering on any important charge, or when we are undecided as to what resolution we ought to come to in an affair of moment; because in these circumstances particularly we require a spirit of counsel and rectitude, of prudence and strength.

But where shall we find this spirit, if not far removed from the tumult of the world, and close to Him who has said of Himself: 'Counsel and equity is mine; prudence is mine; strength is mine?'[1] He alone can impart to us in solitude the 'counsel and prudence' necessary to understand what we have to do, and the 'equity and strength' to execute it. Let us, therefore, gladly take refuge in the abode where 'wisdom abideth with counsel,'[2] and where we shall be 'endued with power from on high.'[3]

3. When we are suffering and anxious, when we are under persecution, any great adversity or misfortune, let us come, in the exercises of retreat, to seek near God a consolation, which our murmurs, discontents, worldly dissipation, and even the society of our friends are unable to afford us. The Royal Prophet informs us that in his trials he had recourse to this source of consolation. In the first instance he portrays the aridity and desola-

[1] Prov. viii. 14. [2] Ibid. vii. 12. [3] Luke xxiv. 49.

tion of his soul and the relentless fury of his spiritual enemy. 'I am grieved in my exercise,' says he, 'and am troubled at the voice of the enemy, and at the tribulation of the sinner; fear and trembling are come upon me, and darkness hath covered me.' What a combination of evils!

What remedy does the holy king oppose to such multiform misfortunes? He teaches us in the continuation of his canticle, 'I said: who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly away and be at rest? I have gone far off flying away; and I abode in the wilderness.'[1] Thus he withdraws, he hides himself in solitude. Amid the tempests which assail him, it is the beacon which guides, the harbour which shelters, the anchor which saves him. There he finds the cessation of his anxieties, relief in his sufferings, consolation in his trials, light in his darkness, the balm for all the miseries of his soul. Let us profit by his example, if we desire to experience the like salutary effects.

4. When tepidity, that fatal precursor of mortal coldness, begins to oppress our soul; when our heart, poured out on exterior objects, seems desirous to become an alien to itself, to give itself up to the dissipation of creatures; when our confessions languish; when we approach the Holy Table without fervour; when we meditate slothfully; when we experience a disgust and disrelish for spiritual things; when our imagination is filled with unchaste ideas, our mind given up to vain thoughts, our will assailed by concupiscence; in a word, when the whole man is delivered up to dangerous temptations, it is then time, it is high time, to oppose, in retreat, a strong barrier to this devastating torrent. In this state the

[1] Ps. liv. 2 and fol.

least delay is dangerous, the shortest delay fraught with peril. Then, 'if you hear the Lord's voice,' 'Ah! I conjure you, as you value your salvation, "harden not your hearts."'[1] For your resistance would indubitably one day attract upon you this equitable and terrible reproach of the Sovereign Judge: 'I called you, and you refused to listen, I also will laugh in your destruction.'[2] To avert so dire a misfortune, let us take the wings of 'the great eagle' of the Apocalypse, and let us 'fly into the desert.'[3]

2. *The method of making the retreat.*

1. We must abstain as much as possible from all other occupations, so that we neither write nor read, nor do anything which does not conduce to the end and object of the retreat.

2. To perform our daily actions with more attention and fervour, and follow with exactitude the rule that shall be laid down for us.

3. To observe exterior solitude carefully by strict silence and a guard over the senses, and interior solitude by a more perfect recollection and more fervent aspirations to God.

4. To write our resolutions. They must be particular, not general. We should determine the circumstances of the place, time, and of the means for fulfilling them.

5. To increase our usual corporal mortifications; to choose for the matter of the particular examen during these three days, the observance of silence, and of the rule, the accomplishment of the employment confided to us.

6. To take care not to make the confession of review

[1] Ps. xciv. 8. [2] Prov. i. 24. [3] Apoc. xii. 14.

of the last six months through routine or custom, but with the desire of drawing from it these three spiritual advantages: the first, to perceive, by seeing all our sins at a glance, whether we have advanced or retrograded in virtue up to the present time; second, to conceive a deeper sorrow for and more lively horror of our faults; third, to discover our predominant passion, that vice which is the root of all our other defects.

7. To commence the work of our spiritual renovation with the firm conviction that we stand in great need of it, even though it may not be long since we have made the great annual retreat, or are soon to make it. We must, likewise, bring to it great generosity of heart, and be ready to accomplish all that shall appear to us to be the will of God, refusing nothing to our Divine Master, but offering ourselves wholly and unreservedly to Him.

8. For this end we must study what God, by His frequent inspirations, seems most particularly to require us to do or to avoid, and remark what constitute the chief obstacles to our spiritual progress. We may read over our resolutions of the preceding retreats, in order to examine how we have kept them. Fidelity to these directions will merit for us the grace to reap the most precious fruits from the retreat.

As we advise that these little retreats of three days be made twice a year, we have arranged a double index at the end of this work, in which the subjects treated of are so arranged as to suit the exercitants of them. We have at the same time indicated the order in which it seems to us advantageous to use them for meditation, spiritual lecture, or particular examen.

If we are unable to devote three whole days to an affair of such moment, let us consecrate only one day to

it, and if, owing to our occupations, even this time is too long, we should not fail at least to spend an hour or two in treating of interests of such vital importance to us.

Knowing the time and method of making retreat, it only remains for us to set to work, with the intimate conviction of the necessity and utility of those holy exercises. We may stimulate our zeal by recalling the following eulogy bestowed on this duty by the illustrious St. Bernard: 'Retreat,' says he, 'purifies the soul, regulates our affections, directs our actions, moderates our excesses, reforms our morals, renders our life virtuous and irreproachable. It foresees what is to be done, judges what has been done, and leaves nothing defective in our heart which it does not correct.' Shall we, then, find it difficult to devote some moments of our life to an occupation so holy, a business so useful and so important, we who so thoughtlessly squander entire hours and days in repose, amusements, sleep, vain labours, and frivolities?

The spiritual favours granted by the Church to the exercise of retreat are an additional inducement to us to make it. The illustrious Pope Benedict XIV. has granted, by a rescript, dated 1753, a plenary indulgence to all those who perform the exercises of St. Ignatius during ten, or even five, days; and this favour he has extended to all who consecrate one day of each month to a preparation for death. This opinion of a Pontiff, at once so saintly and so learned, manifested by the dispensation of the treasures of the Church, cannot leave us any room to doubt of the efficacy of retreat for the attainment of solid virtue.

CONCLUSION, IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT THIS SECOND PART RELATES TO THE ILLUMINATIVE WAY.

In the First Part of this treatise we have gone through the various degrees of the *purgative* way; and in the Second Part we have led our soul in the paths of the *illuminative* way, of this way wherein the heart imbibes and reflects the light of all the Christian virtues. In the *purgative* way, the goal which the soul proposes to itself is the destruction of sin and the casting off of the thraldom under which it groans: in the *illuminative* way the practice of virtue is the luminous path which conducts the soul until it arrives by the *unitive* way at its last end, which is God, to whom it intimately unites itself by perfect charity.

The intention one proposes to himself in the first way is to purify his heart by self-knowledge, the detestation of sin, and repression of concupiscence; in the second way we strive after the acquisition of all virtues, but especially the moral ones. The means of acquiring them are: 1. The knowledge and the esteem of those virtues. 2. Frequent prayer to obtain them. 3. The constant exercise of interior and exterior acts which relate to them.

1. This genuine and practical knowledge of virtue is derived from daily fervent meditation and the exercise of retreat. These two subjects form the matter of the second and sixth chapters.

2. In the fourth chapter we excite ourselves to an ardent and fervent desire of frequent communion, which imparts such efficacy to our petitions for the acquisition of virtue.

3. And lastly, we learn constantly to make acts of it in the considerations on the perfection of our ordinary actions, interior recollection, and the particular examen, which form the objects of the first, third, and fifth chapters.

It is clear, therefore, that this Second Part refers to the *illuminative* way, since we there find the means of knowing and esteeming virtue according to its value, of fervently imploring it, of assiduously exercising ourselves in acts of it, and, in a word, of acquiring it in a perfect degree, which is the end of this way.

If we employ with docility the six means traced out for us, if we are faithful to tread in the *illuminative* way, soon having acquired solid virtue, and being perfected by the motives which we shall meditate in the Third Part, and which relate to the *unitive* way, we will become worthy to contract an intimate union with God.

PART III.

MOTIVES FOR TENDING TO THE PERFECTION OF VIRTUE.

IN the First Part we have sought to remove the obstacles to solid virtue; in the Second we have pointed out the most effectual means for acquiring it; it remains to us to present in this Third Part the most pressing motives for labouring to perfect it in us.

These motives, or at least these which we esteem the principal, are what faith teaches us concerning the value of solid virtue: the fear of the evils incurred by those who neglect it: the hope of the graces obtained through it: the love of God, which exacts and merits that we be solidly virtuous: the happiness enjoyed by the truly perfect, and the crown granted to their perseverance.

At the close of this Third Part we shall show the connection that exists between it and the unitive way.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT FAITH TEACHES US CONCERNING THE EXCELLENCE OF SOLID VIRTUE.

FAITH, according to the Fathers, is the foundation of perfection and the chief means of attaining it; it is also

the first of the spiritual weapons with which we should provide ourselves, to combat and vanquish the sloth and inertia of our will in the practice of good.

Unless the mind be very destitute of reason, and but little susceptible of laudable inclination, it is impossible to believe firmly in the excellence of solid virtue, and contrast its principles with our lives, without desiring to endeavour to amend the one and labour to acquire the other. Whence, I conclude, that this belief is a very powerful incentive to perfection. To confirm ourselves in this happy disposition—1, let us consider the excellence of solid virtue ; 2, let us, under this point of view, compare our conduct with our faith ; and 3, let us study the causes of the contradiction which exists between them, in order to apply a proper remedy thereto.

Article I.

Of the excellence of solid virtue.

First proof.—The judgment of God. Since I am addressing Christians, who believe that God possesses an infinite knowledge, and who adore His infallible veracity, the safest rule that I can adopt to cause them duly to appreciate the excellence of solid virtue is the judgment of this God, who cannot be deceived. 'The judgments of the Lord,' says the Prophet, 'are true, justified in themselves ;'[1] consequently, things are valuable in proportion to the esteem in which they are held by the Eternal Wisdom. That which it prefers to all things, and to which it assigns the first rank in its esteem, must doubtless be the most excellent. Christian perfection merits, therefore, in the esteem of men, not that kind of

[1] Ps. xviii. 10.

preference accorded to it by a deluded world, but that with which the supreme and incorruptible Arbiter honours it. A denial of this truth would be atheism.

Actuated by this principle, let us study in Holy Writ the judgment which that omniscient and infinitely wise God, who penetrates and beholds all things as they are in reality, passes on the excellence of virtue: and let us learn thence to know its price, to understand its dignity, and to love its beauty and prefer it to all things else. 'Earth, earth, earth, which judgeth according to the look of a man,'[1] 'hear the word of the Lord.'[2] The Lord says: 'the possession' of wisdom, which eminently consists in true piety, 'is better than the merchandise of silver, and its fruit than the purest gold: it is more precious than all riches: and all things that are desired are not to be compared with it: it is the tree of life to them that lay hold on it: and he that shall retain it is blessed:'[3] 'it is an infinite treasure to men.'[4] Behold the judgment of God, but mark the consequence that must follow thence; 'gold,' then, 'in comparison' of virtue, 'is as a little sand, and silver in respect of it shall be counted as clay:' therefore, 'it is to be preferred before kingdoms and thrones; riches are to be esteemed nothing in comparison of it, neither can any precious stone be compared to it.'[5] Who will presume to gainsay these divine oracles, or to deny consequences so evident? The Lord says, also through the prophet Jeremias: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, and let not the strong man glory in his strength, and let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, for I am the

[1] 1 Kings xvi. 7. [2] Jerem. xxii. 29. [3] Prov. iii. 14 and fol. [4] Wisd. vii. 14. [5] Wisd. vii. 8.

Lord.'[1] Hence it follows that the practical knowledge of God and of self, which constitutes true virtue, is far preferable to all the riches of the world, to the valour of warriors, the grandeur of kings, the prudence of the flesh, and to all profane sciences, since it alone is the basis of all real glory. It is the Holy Ghost who affirms it. Who would have the folly to dispute it?

The Doctor of the Nations, writing under divine inspiration, develops this truth at still greater length, and enters into still greater details of its consequences: 'If,' says he, 'I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and if I should have prophecy, and should know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity' (which is the beginning and first degree of perfection), 'I am nothing, all that profiteth me nothing; I am but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.'[2] Such is the doctrine of the apostle; but, if the gift of prophecy, of tongues, and miracles, if an infused knowledge of all things, a comprehension of all mysteries, equalling that of the angels, if these gifts which, in our estimation, are the most excellent that can be enjoyed on earth, are valueless before God compared with the least degree of sanctifying grace, what will all purely natural advantages be compared with the countless degrees of grace with which consummate virtue adorns our soul?

Heaven has spoken, let the earth remain silent. Truth has made His voice heard, let error hide itself in shame. The infinite majesty of Him who has pronounced these oracles demands of us a blind faith. Let the earth keep silence, therefore, let reason submit, let 'the wisdom of the world' bow down, let it cease to oppose its vain

[1] Jerem. ix. 23. [2] 1 Cor. xiii. 1 and fol.

sophistry to the decisions from on High. Sanctity possesses an incontestable superiority over all other goods. God has said it. Compared with it all other advantages are less than nothing: so the God infinitely wise and true has declared. However, the Almighty has not merely attested the superexcellence of sanctity, He has even deigned to demonstrate it by numberless facts. Let us select from amongst them some taken from Sacred History. Let us compare Solomon and Job, the wicked rich man and Lazarus, Herod and John the Baptist: what a contrast! how different the judgment of Heaven concerning these and those! 'Solomon surpassed all men in riches and wisdom;'[1] Job, on the contrary, 'was struck with a grievous ulcer from the sole of the foot to the top of his head; and, sitting on a dung-hill, he took a potsherd and scraped the corrupt matter from his wound.'[2] The bad rich man 'was clothed in purple and fine linen: and feasted sumptuously every day,' while the 'poor Lazarus lay at his gate full of sores, desiring to be filled with the crumbs which fell from his table.'[3] 'Herod, being arrayed in kingly apparel, sat in the judgment seat, and the people made acclamation, saying: It is the voice of a god and not of a man;'[4] and already he had caused John the Baptist to be 'apprehended, imprisoned, and beheaded,'[5] 'who came' upon earth 'neither eating nor drinking.'[6] What a contrast! The former endowed with intellectual gifts, power, wealth, seemed to shine as stars above the rest of men; the latter, though perfect in sanctity, were, nevertheless, poor, wretched, despised, the sport of fate and the scorn of the world. Humanly speaking, nothing was more exalted than the

[1] 3 Kings x. 23. [2] Job ii. 7, 8. [3] Luke xvi. 19 and fol.
[4] Acts xii. 21. [5] Matt. xiv. 3, 11. [6] Ibid. xi. 18.

former, nothing more abject than the latter. Solomon's wisdom, the rich man's opulence, Herod's glory, were in their eyes deluded by error and adulation, goods which exalted them to the skies; while Job's patience, Lazarus' poverty, and John's constancy were subjects of contempt to them.

The world applauds a judgment which depreciates the virtues of the latter and extols the natural advantages of the former. But how different is the judgment of God! Hear, oh mortals, and adore the judgment of the Most High! Solomon is a wicked man, whom He rejects; the rich man a fool, whom He 'buries in hell;'[1] Herod a deceitful wretch, whom He condemns to die, 'devoured by worms:'[2] with all their grandeur, riches, eloquence, and profound wisdom, these three individuals were but little, or rather nothing, in the sight of the All Wise; but, on the contrary, Job was regarded by the Sovereign Arbiter of all things as 'a simple and upright man,'[3] 'whom He loaded with benedictions.'[4] Lazarus was an object of predilection of the angels, 'who carried him into Abraham's bosom;'[5] John was 'the greatest of the children of men, and more than a prophet,'[6] and God adorned him with the crown of martyrdom. These three illustrious saints, with their ulcers, poverty, bonds, and anguish, 'shall shine' before the adorable Trinity 'as the brightness of the firmament, as stars for all eternity.'[7] This is the judgment of God: 'as far as the East is from the West,'[8] 'as much as light differs from darkness,'[9] so far does solid virtue excel all the gifts of nature, wealth, and genius.

[1] Luke xvi. 22.
[2] Acts xii. 23.
[3] Job i. 8.
[4] Ibid. xlii. 12.
[5] Luke xvi. 22.
[6] Matt. xi. 9, 11.
[7] Dan. xii. 3.
[8] Ps. cii. 12.
[9] Eccli. ii. 13.

Unite, if you will, in one man the prudence of legislators, the wisdom of philosophers, the science of mathematicians, the eloquence of orators, invest him with the tact of courtiers, the experience of men of the world, a perfect aptitude for all kinds of knowledge, let him abound in riches and honours, endow him with the prerogatives of pontiffs, and the power of kings; still if virtue is lacking to him, he is before God 'wretched, poor, blind, and naked.'[1] But the dumb, the poor, the lame, the paralytic, the mendicant, the illiterate, who shall have promoted the work of their perfection, shall be accounted the friends of Jesus Christ, children of God, and heirs of heaven. For it is virtue alone that can endear and render us pleasing to God: this alone is the golden key which is able to open to the soul the Heart of the Divine Spouse.

Lucifer is another still more striking example of this truth. This rebel angel had received 'the seal of the divine resemblance, full of wisdom and perfect beauty, he was in the pleasures of the paradise of God: every precious stone was his covering; as a mighty Cherub which stretched out his wings, he was set in the holy mountain of God in the midst of stones of fire.'[2] But the very moment that his audacious revolt causes him to fall from sanctity, that moment he is torn from heaven, 'laden with chains and cast into hell to be eternally tormented.'[3] His intelligence, beauty, subtlety, all his natural gifts, cannot retard the execution of the divine vengeance for one second, and though still possessing all these gifts which are the appanage of a spiritual nature, still from that fatal moment he is but a wretched and despicable demon: the Almighty has even left all these gifts to this haughty and reprobate spirit to manifest to

[1] Apoc. iii. 17. [2] Ezech. xxviii. 12. [3] 2 Pet. ii. 4.

the universe how worthless they are in His sight when unaccompanied by sanctity. Behold why it is that Divine Providence often dispenses them with a sort of prodigality to the greatest sinners, to those whom the Scripture does not hesitate to compare to the vile animals which 'return to their vomit,' those unclean animals which after being washed 'wallow again in the mire;'[1] thus would it teach us how lightly those gifts weigh in the scales of the sanctuary, if unfreighted by virtue.

Oh! who will grant me that these words of Scripture may be indelibly engraved on my heart: 'that which is high to men is an abomination before God.'[2] 'The wisdom of this world is but folly in the sight of God.'[3] Salutary thoughts drawn from the book which the prophet saw 'sealed with seven seals,'[4] thoughts worthy of engrossing every moment of our life! Attend, then, all you who esteem the excellence of perfection according to human wisdom, and imprint this oracle of heaven deeply on your mind: that which you esteem as great, noble, exalted, is not only vile, little, pure nothingness before God, it is an abomination and a folly. Yes, foolish slaves of vanity, so it is, the pride of riches, the ambition of renown, the vanity of knowledge are an abomination before God; the art of courtiers, worldly cunning, insinuating manners are a folly in His eyes: virtue is the only sacrifice which is agreeable to Him. It is only 'the poor in spirit, the meek, the pacific, the merciful, the clean of heart, those who hunger and thirst after justice that are blessed.'[5] What is mean, abject, loathsome in our eyes is noble, glorious, and precious in the sight of God. This truth is a dogma of faith as incon-

[1] 2 Pet. ii. 22. [2] Luke xvi. 15. [3] 1 Cor. iv. 19
[4] Apoc. v. 1. [5] Matt. v. 3 and fol.

testable as that of the Blessed Trinity itself. But what practical results do we derive from this reflection? 'Lord, glorious in holiness,'[1] I am filled with confusion and fear; confusion for my faults, fear for the punishment they merit. If I do not believe Thy oracles I am guilty of heresy; if I believe them without forming more correct ideas of the excellence of virtue, I am amenable to Thy justice for my preposterous folly; I deserve to be bound and handed over to Thy justice. My God, deliver me from this twofold misfortune. Grant me in Thy mercy a faith docile to the equity of Thy judgment concerning the excellence of sanctity.

2. *Second proof.*—The example of Jesus Christ. The example of Jesus Christ is a striking proof of the excellence of sanctity. This Divine Saviour deigned to be born in a stable, to live unknown, to be nailed to the cross, and die in the midst of unheard-of torments, in order to teach us the superiority of solid virtue over all the gifts of nature.

It is certain that the Eternal Father combined all natural perfections in a supereminent degree in the person of our Redeemer; that He exalted Him in knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, above all angels and men. This being so, does it not seem that, on coming into the world, the Incarnate Word should have appeared in the maturity of perfect manhood, have shone in the schools, traversed seas, taken His seat on the tribunals of the judges of the earth, frequented royal palaces, to dispense in every direction the lights of eloquence, prudence, knowledge, and sound morality, to dispel ignorance, to reform morals, to inaugurate the reign of justice, to punish crime, and by the fame of these achievements,

[1] Exod. xv. 12.

the report of which would resound throughout the universe, to subjugate the faith of all peoples, and prove incontestably that He was the Messiah. But instead of this display, He comes in the weakness of infancy, He is born between two animals in the corner of an obscure stable, exposed to the inclemency of the weather, destitute of all things, an exile from His country. More advanced in age, He continues unknown, humble, despised. He shuts Himself up in a humble workshop for the greater part of His life. The reputed son of a simple artisan, He embraces that profession; He abides as constantly in the poor house of Nazareth as though He were but a servant. 'God obeys the voice of man,'[1] 'He is subject'[2] to His creatures. O prodigy! incomprehensible to the angels themselves. The Word utters only wailings; concealed under infantine lineaments, Wisdom lisps; Strength clothed in our weakness, like us 'utters His first voice in crying.'[3] The hands which have fashioned the universe debase themselves to the performance of the most menial offices of the household. 'He who hath poised with three fingers the bulk of the earth, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance,'[4] hews wood, carves, and works it.

O heavens! The Increated Eloquence keeps silence; the Creator of the universe debases Himself to the profession of a humiliating trade; the true Treasure of wisdom and knowledge lies concealed in a servile condition: He continues thus for thirty years. And this august Master, descended from heaven, adopts this line of conduct to impress us still more with the excellence of sanctity: to divest us of the erroneous ideas which we form to ourselves of natural gifts to the prejudice of

[1] Josue x. 14. [2] Luke ii. 51. [3] Wisd. vii. 3. [4] Isaias xl. 12.

virtue: to teach us by His example that the glory of brilliant reputation, the pride of distinguished talents, the conveniences of life, are infinitely inferior to one pious action practised secretly by a virtuous soul in the lowest place in the universe. After so striking and practical an instruction, a Christian who still seeks to be esteemed and preferred to others for his natural qualities; who sets his heart on these vanities, who admires, desires, and covets them more than the possession of virtue, either does not believe in the life led by Jesus Christ, or else he concludes that Wisdom itself has been deceived in His choice. For to avow that Jesus Christ has performed all things holily and perfectly, to confess that He desires that His actions should be the model of ours, and yet, despite this firm belief, to persevere in refusing to admit the superiority of virtue over every other good, to presume to despise or neglect its practice, is an inexcusable perversity and folly.

But that this conviction may penetrate to the depth of our soul, let us cast our eyes upon Mount Calvary, let us fathom this ocean of sufferings of the Man-God, let us contemplate the streams of Blood which flow from all His members, let us consider the multitude and violence of the wounds which disfigure His body, and let us examine the cause for which the only Son of God has deigned to die in torments and ignominy, suspended to the cross between two thieves. 'Ah!' replies the apostle to us: 'He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from our iniquities and might cleanse to Himself a people acceptable, a pursuer of good works.'[1] Yes, answer 'the angels of peace, weeping bitterly,'[2] the Innocent has endured these excruciating torments, not for

[1] Titus ii. 12, 14. [2] Isaias xxxiii. 7.

the purpose of loading men with riches, honours, and worldly gratifications: not in order to enrich them with the gifts of nature: to acquire for them a reputation for eloquence, wit, superior knowledge, a marvellous aptitude for success in every undertaking; but to make them esteem, love, and desire virtue, contemn the world, and cultivate the spirit of penance; to teach them that one ray of divine grace is of incomparably more value than all the goods of nature taken collectively.

Come now all you who, blinded by the illusions of vanity, bend the knee before the fortunate and sparkling geniuses of this world, come listen to your Divine Saviour saying to you by the suffering and ignominy of His death: 'Learn of me not to create the universe, to draw all visible and invisible things from nothing, to work miracles, to raise the dead; but learn of me that I am meek and humble of heart,'[1] learn of me the true and solid virtue which I have taught you at the price of so much anguish and opprobrium, at the cost of my life, and of all the blood that I have shed. Thus it is that 'I have given you an example, that as I have done you do also.'[2]

What inference are we to draw from these reasonings? Either Jesus Christ has made a mistake in giving the infinite price of His blood and life for a thing of so little value in human estimation; or virtue, notwithstanding its worthlessness in the eyes of men, is a good incomparably greater than all earthly possessions. Come, then, my soul, come to the foot of the cross, purify thy mental vision, weigh seriously the justice of this conclusion—the argument is irrefragable.

My Jesus, what reply can I make to Thee? The

[1] St. Aug. Serm. [2] John xiii. 13.

divine judgment and Thy example, O my adorable Master, are incontrovertible evidences of the incomparable excellence of sanctity. I firmly believe in its superiority over all the gifts of fortune and of genius. I believe that one ray of heavenly light penetrating into our hearts is of more value than all the secular sciences; that one meritorious action is of greater price than all natural endowments; that the faintest ray of grace is preferable to all the treasures of the world; that the lowest degree of supernatural glory is more sublime than all the pageantry and honours of earth. I firmly believe this doctrine, because Thou hast taught it, O Sovereign Truth! But 'help my unbelief,'[1] for from high heaven, where Thou reignest, Thou beholdest that my faith wavers the moment I am called upon to reduce it to practice, and daily experience incessantly augments my sense of weakness. By the might of Thine arm assist me in my infirmity, grant me grace 'to unite rectitude of conduct to that of faith, and to confess Thee both by words and actions—by words in confessing the truth, by actions in practising justice.'[2]

Article II.

Of the opposition between our faith and our life.

1. *Proof of this truth by induction.*

We assent, it is true, to all the Scripture teaches concerning the excellence of virtue. We admire its beauty, vaunt its merit, acknowledge its necessity, esteem its advantages, earnestly desire the happiness and glory it imparts. We allow that sanctity is the lost drachma,

[1] Mark ix. 23. [2] St. Aug. Serm.

the pearl of price, the treasure hidden in the field of religion, a treasure for the acquisition of which we should spare neither trouble nor expense—we admit that all natural gifts, compared with perfection, lose their lustre as stars pale in presence of the sun.

In the person of Jesus Christ we adore sanctity fastened to the cross, we honour it placed on our altars with the relics of the saints; we pay it our homage concealed beneath the ashes of the friends of God, in their tombs and precious remains. We do not presume to impugn the truth of these oracles of Holy Writ: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek, the peacemakers, the merciful,' etc. In a word, we readily believe and confess that nothing is more useful or charming than piety; but does our life square with our faith? Do our actions coincide with our words? Is our conduct conformable to our principles? Do we do what we believe we are bound to do?—behold the important point. 'True faith,' says St. Gregory the Great, 'consists in not belying our words by our behaviour: he alone believes truly who practises what he professes?'[1] Is it thus we act? Does our demeanour correspond with our faith? 'Faith and good works,' says St. Eucherius, 'depend so closely on one another that either must necessarily perish if unsustained by the other.' Does this union exist in us? Do the belief of our understanding and the acts of our will go hand in hand? St. Augustine styles 'faith without love, the faith of demons.'[2] St. Bernard tells us that 'faith which worketh not is a dead body.' A most just metaphor, since, according to St. James, 'Faith without works is dead.'[3] In what state is ours? Let us test it by our works, and see

[1] Homil. on Gosp. [2] City of God. [3] James ii. 17.

whether we be not in danger of shipwreck. Oh! how I fear lest I be of the number of those 'who profess that they know God, but in their works deny Him.[1] 'The voice is the voice of Jacob,' nothing could be more Catholic than our words; but 'the hands are the hands of Esau.'[2] Alas! how vast the disparity between our actions and our sentiments. Let us prove it by some examples.

We believe that the acquisition of solid virtue is in reality our great, most important, and only necessary affair; for which the Eternal Father has sent us His Son; Jesus Christ ransomed us, the Holy Ghost has enlightened us with His grace and called us to the religious state: the affair compared with which all others are childish and trifling. We believe this, and yet, as a general rule, this is the affair which is of all others the most neglected by us. We know that the exercises of devotion, especially meditation, spiritual lecture and examen of conscience, are the most effectual means of accomplishing this affair; and yet from some frivolous excuse, a useless occupation, a slight inconvenience, we defer, abridge, and even altogether omit these holy exercises; or at most we acquit ourselves of them tepidly and carelessly. Interior recollection, the perfection of our ordinary actions, and the particular examen, are also most excellent aids for acquiring virtue; nevertheless, their very name is almost a dead letter to us, so unaccustomed are we to make use of them. What is such behaviour if not a direct contradiction of our faith? The science of the saints is the only thing that avails aught before God: without it all secular learning is but smoke. And yet, oh, the folly! we spend nights and days, to the prejudice of our health,

[1] Titus i. 16. [2] Serm. on Epiph.

in intellectual pursuits, which will probably never be called into requisition by us; while the study of heavenly wisdom wearies and disgusts us. Oblivious of eternity, we dilate upon time; indifferent about heaven, all our thoughts concentrate upon earth. We investigate the nature of light, and our soul is enveloped in darkness. True, 'knowledge is not to be blamed, as it is a good thing in itself; but a good conscience and a virtuous life are always to be preferred.'[1] We must never neglect our soul for the study of literature, or abandon our spiritual exercises for any cause; otherwise our virtue shall suffer serious detriment. 'Many,' says the Imitation, 'go astray because they take more pains to know much than to live well. They are lost in their own imaginings, because they love to be great rather than humble. How many perish in the world by vain learning who take little care of the service of God! Would to God that their lives had been in keeping with their learning, they would then have studied to good purpose. Oh! had they been as diligent in the extirpation of their vices and the grafting in of virtues as they are in mooting questions, there would not be so many evils and scandals among the people, or such laxity in monasteries.' But because the reverse of this is often the case, the tempests which agitate the Church are excited by learned but impious leaders. From these unworthy leaders it is that she sustains the greatest injuries.

And I ask you, when death arrives, of what avail to us will be all the knowledge we have acquired during our life at the cost of so much toil, anxiety, vigils, and labour, and especially to the prejudice of our sanctity? What will the study of so many works, the publication

[1] Imit. b. i. ch. 3.

of so many fine maxims, so many carefully written pages of ostentatious erudition, profit us? Of what advantage, I say, will all these things be except to occasion us bitter remorse for having exhausted our energies, consumed our strength, sacrificed our health and repose for the acquirement of so much worthless knowledge, and neglected the study of the only thing capable of consoling us at the hour of death? 'When the day of judgment cometh it will not be asked of us what we have read, but what we have done; not what splendid orations we have made, but how religiously we have lived. It is therefore great folly to neglect the things that are useful and necessary and dive into those that are injurious.'[1] It is folly to be preoccupied about what argument we shall adduce against an adversary in a public thesis and not consider what reply we shall make to the Sovereign Judge in the day of His wrath. Finally, it is madness to neglect our sanctification, to squander so many days, weeks, and months perusing works and taking notes which perhaps we afterwards destroy. Could a pagan believe such behaviour possible in a Christian?

Unhappy you whose conduct is a tacit denial of your belief. You are aware that a single supernatural act of virtue merits a new degree of grace, to which is attached the right to a new degree of glory: you are aware that a single degree of grace and glory infinitely transcends in value all the kingdoms of the world, all the gifts of nature, intellect, and fortune: you know that were you, in exchange for such a degree of grace and glory, to be offered the wisdom, riches, and royal power of Solomon: were you, on the same condition, to be exalted to the highest dignities, to attain to the summit of earthly happi-

[1] Imit. b. i. ch. 3.

ness, by accepting it you would relinquish a peerless pearl for a piece of glass, refined gold for worthless tinsel.

O heavens! 'to obtain a scanty sustenance men run a great way; for eternal life, to tend to perfection, many will scarce take a step; a petty gain is sought after; for a single coin men sometimes quarrel; yea, for some mere trifle or a slight promise, men will toil night and day; but alas! for an unchangeable good, for an imperishable glory,' in a word, for solid virtue, 'they are loath to undergo a little fatigue.'[1]

Moreover, it is only temporal advantages and natural gifts that attract us in others. We ask if a man is endowed with courage, wealth, beauty, learning, if he writes or sings well, if he is clever in his profession, but we rarely inquire if he is meek, humble, patient, devout, interior; we look only to the exterior, and are indifferent as to the interior. What is still more to be lamented is that this error obtains not merely with those who occupy the lowest ranks of the religious hierarchy, it even frequently influences its heads. Too often superiors accord an unjust preference to such of their inferiors as are endowed with brilliant qualities, though they be marred by serious defects; they favour them, extol them, and elevate them to the prejudice of religious whose only recommendation is their piety. Such a mode of behaviour scandalises the weak, who imagine and proclaim that virtue is ignored here below, that those who practise it remain in the last ranks, that superiors prefer and attach more importance to natural gifts than to the observance of rule. Could Satan himself suggest thoughts more conducive to the subversion of even the most flourishing religious orders? But we have given sufficient proofs

[1] Imit. b. iii. ch. 3.

of the opposition between our life and faith; it is sufficiently demonstrated that frequently our conduct and morals are a formal denial of the truths we believe.

2. *The contradiction between our life and our faith is disgraceful to us.*

'Brethren,' says the apostle St. James, 'what shall it profit if a man say he hath faith, but hath not works?'[1] 'What avails it,' says St. Jerome, 'for a bad catholic to possess the treasure of faith, and despoil his soul of the possession of wisdom and piety?'[2] Of what use to us is the conviction of the superior excellence of virtue, if our habits are perpetually at variance with our belief? What fruits can we gather from this blighted tree save those of confusion and remorse?

'It is a senseless obstinacy,' says Picus of Mirandola, 'not to believe a Gospel whose truth is proclaimed by the blood of martyrs, proved by miracles, confirmed by reason, confessed by demons, attested by myriad examples of the obedience of the elements themselves to the voice of faith, but it is a criminal inconsistency to believe firmly in the truth of the Gospel and yet to live as though we had no doubt of its falsehood. Yes, it is an excess of folly to believe all that is taught concerning the excellence of piety, and still to neglect its practice as though the divine oracles were but the delirium of an exaggerated devotion. It is most iniquitous to know, honour, and applaud the morality of Jesus Christ, and regulate our lives on principles which are diametrically opposed thereto. Is it not a preposterous absurdity to believe that God is infinitely good, and not to love Him ardently; infinitely just, and not fear His justice; in-

[1] James ii. 14. [2] On Proverbs.

finitely holy, ubiquitous, omniscient, and yet to dare to sin even venially in His presence; to believe that our Redeemer has made true riches to consist in poverty, joy in penance, happiness in perfection, and yet to dread poverty, fly penance, neglect perfection; to believe that we are bound to practise humility, mortify the flesh, subdue and annihilate our will, and yet to desire honours, gratifications, and pleasures, to be worshippers at the shrine of our own opinions?

'Be just and judge yourselves,' whether reason or justice authorises such behaviour, whether believing as we do, it is not incompatible with prudence to ally so much tepidity, abuse of grace, and neglect of spiritual things with the morality of the Gospel? Oh! how calculated to confound the culpable and inexcusable folly of the Christians of the present time is the example of the primitive faithful! Their faith triumphed even in chains despite the rage of tyrants. These illustrious children of the Church 'wandered about in sheep-skins, and in goat-skins, being in want, distress, and affliction; they suffered mockeries and bonds, they were stoned, they were cut asunder, they were tempted; they were put to death by the sword,'[1] and yet they deviated not from the path of virtue on which they had entered; they hungered and thirsted after justice, beneath the sword of the executioner, stretched on the red-hot gridiron, on the rack, and on the scaffold, in the midst of waves and flames. 'They served God in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, in persecution and reproaches; they renounced all they possessed, they desired nothing, and it grieved them to serve the body even in necessity.'[2] In a word, they practised what their faith prescribed. But we

[1] Heb. xi. 36 and fol. [2] Imit. b. i. ch. 18.

are arrested in the path of perfection by the most trifling impediment. 'There is a lion in the way,'[1] 'death is in this pot,'[2] such are the ordinary excuses which our sloth alleges. Yes, our lives are a perpetual denial of our faith. Unfortunate that we are! what shall one day be our consternation, when the Sovereign Judge, addressing us in a voice of thunder, and with a wrath depicted on His countenance, shall say to us: 'Wicked servant, I judge thee by thy own mouth; behold what thou hast believed; behold how thou hast acted;' behold thy faith; behold thy conduct. What reply shall we make? What a terrific awakening when this faith which is now dead in our heart shall arise to accuse us? St. Augustine assures us that faith shall one day return to avenge its rights at the divine tribunal, not against the persecutors of the Church, since 'the blood of martyrs was the seed of Christianity,'[3] nor against pagans who can plead the excuse of their ignorance, nor against heretics, because, 'he that doth not believe is already judged,'[4] but against 'those who are of the household of the faith,'[5] against bad Christians: it shall depose against us who have been 'nourished in good doctrine,'[6] against us, I say, in whom it has lain dead and as it were buried during so many years, who have dishonoured it before men and robbed it even of the vestige of esteem in which they held it.

Nothing, in fact, brings so much discredit and odium on religion in the opinion of worldlings, nothing so promptly divests it of their esteem and respect as the forgetfulness and contempt in which it is held by those who, by the obligation of their state, make profession of cultivating it, and whose lives should be a continual

[1] Prov. xxvi. 13. [2] 4 Kings iv. 40. [3] Tertull.
[4] John iii. 18. [5] Gal. vi. 10. [6] 1 Tim. iv. 6.

study, an assiduous practice of perfection. But how sad it would be if those who ought to be the 'corner stones'[1] of the house of God, should become 'rocks of scandal?'[2] What danger if those who are the 'shield of faith,'[3] serve as 'snares of the devil'[4] against souls? What have we not to apprehend, should faith, the safeguard of our salvation, form the basis of our accusation? Such a thought fills us with shame and dread, and yet we neglect to conform our conduct to our faith.

'Lord God of Truth,'[5] who didst so often 'upbraid' Thy disciples with 'their incredulity and hardness of heart,'[6] 'augment our faith, and grant that, confessing it with our lips, we may likewise verify it in our conduct. Vivify us by the fervour of Thy spirit, grant that we may be found stable in faith, and faithful in works, and that aided by Thy grace, we may fulfil the obligations which Thy divine light has revealed to us.'[7] Suffer not, we conjure Thee, that our faith become a 'millstone fastened round our neck to drag us into perdition, or at least into purgatory.'[8]

Article III.

Of the sources of the contradiction between our life and our faith and the remedies for them.

Faith is to the Christian what the sun is to the universe. The sun illumines all bodies by its light, and heats them by its warmth, so likewise faith enlightens the understanding of the faithful soul by communicating to it the science of salvation, and inflames its will while inviting it to accomplish the duties which it inculcates.

[1] 1 Pet. ii. 3. [2] Ibid. ii. 8. [3] Ephes. vi. 16.
[4] 1 Tim. iii. 7. [5] Ps. xxx. 6. [6] Mark xvi. 14.
[7] Prayers of Church at Mass. [8] Luke x. 15.

Therefore it is that faith is styled by the Fathers the eye of the soul. The infernal fowler spares no pains to pluck out this eye, or so far cloud and obscure it as to destroy its action. This ruthless tyrant knows that there is no more fatal blindness for the human heart than that of faith. Let us, then, take salutary precaution against his machinations by studying the sources of this disease and the remedies for it.

1. *Causes of the diminution of our faith.*

The diminution of our faith has its origin in the darkness of the understanding which refuses to receive the heavenly light, and the disorder of the will whose passions resist the inspirations of grace. The one prevents our knowing what is good, the other impedes our practising the good that we know. Both defects combined destroy all conformity between our life and faith.

First. It is to the obscurity of the understanding, the unhappy darkness in which their souls are immersed, that we are to attribute that dead and sterile faith, that depravity of life which characterises the great bulk of mankind. The Scripture itself teaches: 'There are now no saints' upon earth, because 'truths are decayed from among the children of men,'[1] 'they walk in the vanity of their mind,'[2] 'they became vain in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened.'[3] Doubtless, then, the absence of the divine light is one of the sources of the malady we are now investigating. But how can we realise the possibility of such a state of things existing amongst Christians, and above all amongst religious, seated as they are at 'the source of light,'[4] who read pious books, hear sermons, meditate in solitude on the means

[1] Ps. xi. 1. [2] Ephes. iv. 17. [3] Rom. i. 21. [4] Josue xv. 7.

of practising their faith, and who frequently receive interior revelations of it by the vivid lights with which grace penetrates their souls? What then are the roots of so baneful an evil? They are as follows:

1. We neglect our pious exercises, which are the channels through which grace is wont to reach us, or we perform them tepidly, and consequently without fruit. The result is, that the Almighty punishes us by refusing to us subsequently the lights which were destined for us.

2. We have contracted a certain habit of dissimulating the holy maxims of virtue from ourselves, even while listening to them, of meditating on them without attention, reading them without reflection; thus when, like a flash of lightning emanating from the divine mercy, they shine interiorly on our soul, they strike upon our heart, it is true, but are unable to find admission there.

3. Our cowardice recoils from the efforts necessary to become thorough converts, and we deliberately close our eyes to the arguments which would convince us of the necessity of a serious repentance. We cherish our disease and refuse all remedies. We shudder lest the importunities of grace should succeed in rousing us from our lethargy: we shrink from that brightness which would dispel the darkness that we love: we are displeased if the cushions be removed whereon our sloth reposes. We shun the exterior aids which God so frequently offers us in order to make His light reach us, such as sermons, retreats, spiritual reading, meditation; but we entertain a special aversion for those zealous ministers of penance, those spiritual masters who would understand how to lay the finger on the wound, to discern the fire which still smoulders beneath the ashes, to discover the lurking places of those rapacious reptiles

which prey upon our soul. In a word, we do not wish to amend, and consequently we fear nothing more than to be enlightened.

4. When, like new Sauls, we are forced to a momentary self-introspection, because a 'great sudden' and unexpected 'light from heaven surrounds us,'[1] strikes us despite our reluctance, and displays the incomparable beauty of solid virtue, when the sting of remorse, penetrating our soul, awakens us to the contrast that exists between our lives and our faith; we still obstinately resist the manifestation of truth; we steel ourselves against its sweet insinuations; we seek in society and in the hurry of business subjects of distraction which dim, stifle, and extinguish the light of grace which sought to irradiate our heart.

Is it surprising, therefore, that a Christian soul remains immersed in darkness though daily exposed to the brilliant rays of grace? that religious so far forget themselves as to think and speak like the world concerning the maxims of the Gospel? and that for very many amongst us the Sun of Justice should be so often eclipsed? We close all the apertures by which its divine brightness might reach our heart, thus we always remain deprived of its light. Behold the real sources whence proceeds the obscurity of our understanding, and consequently the inutility of our faith, or rather the deplorable contradiction which exists between it and our conduct.

Secondly. The second cause of the diminution of our faith is the perversity and disorder of a will swayed by the tyranny of its passions. It is as true that no one shall enter heaven unless he offer violence to himself, abhor the spirit of the world, and love his enemies, as

[1] Acts xxii. 6.

it is certain that he shall have no part in the kingdom of God if he has not been regenerated by baptism: nevertheless, we do not concede our adhesion to both these points of doctrine with equal unreserve and candour. We voluntarily subscribe to the oracles of Scripture, which demand the sacrifice of the mind and a *speculative* faith. But the truths which require the submission of the will and a *practical* faith, which tend to confirm our lives in the principles of our belief, do not obtain access to our hearts without much resistance. For example, we confess with a perfect conviction the unity of God, the trinity of the Divine Persons; we adore the annihilations of the Word in the mystery of the Incarnation, the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist: we unhesitatingly admit all the truths of this description. But when it is said to us: 'Blessed are they that mourn, that hunger and thirst after justice, that suffer persecution,'[1] 'woe to those that are rich, woe to those that laugh,'[2] 'woe to those that spend their days in wealth,'[3] 'pluck out your eye, cut off your hand and foot,'[4] if they are to you a subject of scandal. To believe these maxims, to confess them as incontrovertible dogmas, to submit our judgment in this point to the yoke of the Gospel, there it is that the difficulty begins: it is a goal to which we cannot attain without an effort.

The secret of this difference is easily solved. The faith in the first of these truths is a speculative one: it does not interfere with our evil inclinations, neither does it so directly attack our self-love, nor so openly declare war against our senses. Behold why it is that our depraved passions are less antagonistic to them; but the

[1] Matt. v. 3 and fol. [2] Luke vi. 24. [3] Job xxi. 13.
[4] Mark ix. 42 and fol.

second truths are practical: they demand actions conformable to our belief, they ordain the accomplishment of what we believe. Condemned by these immutable rules of virtue, all our wicked propensities rebel and rise up against them. Self-love, the flesh, and the senses fly to arms and engage in the combat: our heart allows itself to be drawn into the conspiracy with all the more pliancy in that the enemy already possesses a secret understanding with it, so that it willingly consents to be bribed and won over by their perfidious and deceitful insinuations. Succumbing to its own weakness, our will, the queen and first of the faculties of the soul, leagues with its foes to stifle the voice of faith, whose holy exactions are become irksome to it: it has not the courage to reprobate as an evil that which its carnal eyes represent as a good; it would gladly descry falsehood, or at least exaggeration in a morality which religion holds to be alone true: it regards perfection as a mere chimera, and rejects the practice of solid virtue as a dream.

Plunging deeper still into the abyss, it seeks to shroud reason in darkness, in order to escape the inflexibility of its decrees; it endeavours to circumvent it, to engage it in its interests; it tries to blind it, to impose its depraved opinions on it and force it to approve of, as good and virtuous, whatever gratifies self-love, the senses and the flesh. Finally, it contrives to envelop our mind in such obscurity that it is, as it were, impossible for the truth to penetrate it. Not content with these sad results, the will, emboldened by its success, compels the understanding, by a sacrilegious manœuvre, to arraign faith before an incompetent tribunal; there it is interrogated, constrained to justify itself, bring forward its proofs, and it is our weak intellect which has the audacity to arro-

gate to itself the office of judge and pronounce sentence; but, as the whole proceedings of this tribunal are irregular, since it is only the testimony of the passions that is listened to, can it be wondered at that faith and virtue succumb when it is with earth that the sentence lies? and that it is obliged to exile itself, or at least to withdraw passive, silent, and almost lifeless into some obscure corner of the soul, while self-love, assuming a decisive supremacy, interprets the maxims of Jesus Christ according to its caprice, softens the severity of the Gospel, accommodates devotion to the ideas of the age, confounds the spirit of God with the spirit of the world, strives to make a compact betwixt light and darkness, the Ark and Dagon, Jesus Christ and Belial, nature and grace? Meantime, what can be the result of this heterogeneous mixture, save a monstrous and perpetual contradiction between our life and our faith? We must admit, therefore, that the revolt of our passions, the perversity and disorder of our will, as well as the darkening of our understanding, are the ordinary sources of the languor, the defection, and the ruin of our faith.

Let us trace idolatry, infidelity, and heresy to their origin, and we shall find they all take their rise in the ascendancy of vice over man's will. St. John relates that 'several amongst' the Jews, even 'of the chief men, believed in Jesus Christ, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him in public.'[1] Why this dissimulation? Because pride and human respect predominated over them and that 'they loved the glory of men more than the glory of God.'[2] The pagans themselves, whose brutal passions, lust, ambition, avarice, saw only 'folly,'[3] in the mystery of the cross, did not hesitate

[1] John xii. 42. [2] Ibid. xii. 43. [3] 1 Cor. i. 23.

to offer incense to an adulterous Jupiter, a pilfering Mercury, an unchaste Venus, because they were enamoured of the vices of these odious divinities. The predominant passion was the sacrificer which erected sacrilegious altars to these idols. Heresy, it is true, has its seat in the understanding, but it is to the depravity of the heart that it owes its birth and its progress. It is from evil passions that the most culpable and contradictory doctrines have emanated, and all heretical sects, the daughters of licentiousness, violence, and envy, invariably bear upon their brow the impress of their origin. Every new religion is uniformly the offspring of some monstrous passion.

How many are to be found, even among Catholics, who are unworthy of the name, who do not believe as they ought because they do not wish, who refuse to do what they know they are bound to do. They allow themselves the liberty of doubting, that they may act with less restraint; they shrink from being enlightened because the idea of conversion terrifies them; they pray for their cure but fear to be heard; they pretend to seek what they have no desire to find. Alas! this is occasioned by the rebellion of the passions and the corruption of the heart. 'It is difficult to live badly,' says St. Augustine, when 'one believes well.' I confidently add that it is almost impossible to live well when we believe badly.

These are so many irrefragable proofs that the disorder of the will and the darkening of the understanding are the empoisoned source whence the deplorable contradiction between our life and our faith proceeds.

2. *Remedies.*

The first remedy to be applied to the ravages of so baneful an evil is fidelity to the divine inspirations, the prompt and vigorous repression of the revolt of the passions. This generosity will dissipate the mortal darkness which obscures our understanding, liberate our hearts from the perversity which enthrals our will, and prepare these two faculties of the soul, the one to understand more clearly the maxims of faith, the other to practise them better. As this point refers to what we have already explained in the first part of this work, Chapter III., of the Abuse of Grace, and Chapter IV., of the Predominant Passion, we shall not develop it further.

The second remedy consists in making acts of faith in the practical truths of religion, especially when tepidity or disgust for spiritual things begins to take possession of our soul; it is in these circumstances especially that it is most expedient to reanimate the fervour of our faith by saying, for instance: 'I believe, Lord, on the authority of Thy word, that those are blessed who hunger and thirst after justice; that a single act of virtue is incomparably more estimable than all the treasures of the world. I believe that the care of my soul and advancement in perfection are my greatest, most useful, and only necessary affair. I believe that all is vanity of vanities, that there is nothing solid save the love and service of God alone.' A frequent repetition of these or similar acts will rectify our erroneous ideas of sanctity, overcome our difficulties in the practice of virtue, and put an end to the unhappy contradiction between our life and our faith.

The third remedy is a generous resolution, fortified

occasionally by a temporary vow, to perform our exercises of piety each day with perseverance, integrity and fervour; never to omit, defer, or curtail them without a very urgent and serious cause; to have a fixed time consecrated to these holy exercises, and to apply with a scrupulous exactitude the moment we have leisure for anything we may have been obliged to postpone. Though it would not be a mortal sin, it would nevertheless be a very serious fault to fail to fulfil this resolution under the pretext of study or any other business.

Accursed, then, be all knowledge which I would have acquired at the expense of virtue, anathema those occupations which I could only have fulfilled by neglecting my religious exercises! May they, like the mountains of Gelboa, be struck with a malediction: 'may the dew' of grace, may 'the rain' of the divine benedictions 'no longer descend on them!' May an eternal condemnation, a mark of reprobation, pursue that study, that action to which I devoted myself to the prejudice of my spiritual interests! May those employments, offices, labours, cares, solicitudes, which have absorbed me to the detriment of piety and virtue be destitute of fruit, success, and honour: may a thousand obstacles thwart them and disgust me with them for ever! And this is what usually happens; for experience teaches us that very frequently, by a just judgment of God, one does not acquire the knowledge for which he abandons virtue and the care of his own sanctification; and should he do so, it is neutralized by illness or rejected by God, who does not make use of the learning of such persons for the promotion of His glory. He seems to take a kind of pleasure in paralyzing by means as secret as they are admirable, those labours which are undertaken to the prejudice of virtue.

For any one who does not prefer his spiritual advancement to these superfluous occupations wounds our Lord in the apple of the eye.

For our part, let us shun a similar excess by always performing the spiritual exercises we have prescribed for ourselves before everything else. A lively and active faith is a precious gift from God: let us frequently implore it of the Father of lights by ardent desire and fervent prayer, saying with the blind man of the Gospel: 'Lord, grant that I may see;'[1] or with the apostles: 'increase my faith.'[2] We deceive ourselves much if we imagine that the acquisition of the priceless treasure of faith is above our strength, and that we can no more aspire to it than to the power of working miracles, the possession of the gift of tongues, of prophecy, of tears, and of the discernment of spirits. We admire the heroic and practical faith of the saints: we even envy it as a source of happiness; we long to participate in those bright interior lights which they have received, but, idiot-like, we cross our arms, we remain listless, we seem to expect a miracle to be wrought in our favour; we imitate the sluggard who 'hideth his hand under his armpit,' and whose 'indolent desires kill him.'[3] Let us then entreat, let us make constant efforts, let us labour, let us knock with unbounded confidence at the door of the divine mercy, for Jesus Christ has promised that 'the Father from heaven will give a good spirit to them that ask Him.'[4]

Aided by these means, we shall preserve our faith from the double misfortune of a darkening of the understanding and disorder of the will; from this twofold evil, which, depriving us of the divine inspirations and

[1] Luke xviii. 41. [2] John xvii. 5. [3] Prov. xix. 24. [4] Luke xi. 13.

exciting the revolt of the passions, occasions this lamentable contradiction which exists between our faith and our life. Let us engrave these means deeply in our memory for the purpose of reducing them to practice. Otherwise, let us beware lest our faith, whose teaching should lead us, as it were, by steps to heaven, shall have only exalted us, in order to cause us to fall from the greater height into hell.

Let us beware lest our Saviour, instead of saying to us as to the blind man of Jericho, 'Go, thy faith hath saved thee,'[1] should say to us, 'Go, thy faith hath damned thee;' for, says St. Augustine, 'the dignity of the name of Christian alone does not constitute a Christian, and it avails us nothing to bear the title if we do not perform the works.' It was the realisation of this truth that elicited from St. Jerome the following prayer: 'O Jesus! I remember that Thou didst say to the two blind men, "Be it done to you according to your faith;" Lord, these words make me tremble, for if I be treated according to my faith I shall perish.' O heavens! if a St. Jerome, the intrepid defender of the Church, the steadfast pillar and perfect model of faith, trembles thus, what should be our terror? How should we not fear, whose lives are a practical denial of our belief? O God, who desirest our sanctification, penetrate our soul with the strength of the reasons we have just been meditating, grant us the grace to prove by the remainder of our life that we are truly convinced of the high excellence of solid virtue!

[1] Luke vii. 50.

CHAPTER II.

OF THE FEAR OF THE EVILS WHICH WILL BEFALL US IF WE NEGLECT TO ACQUIRE SOLID VIRTUE.

It is impossible to consider seriously the contrast that exists between our life and faith, without experiencing a religious dread of the evils which impend over us if we do not promptly correct such an unfortunate discrepancy, and labour to attain perfection with all that energy which the excellence of virtue merits. So salutary an influence does this fear exert over the resolutions of our will, that God Himself, in Scripture, frequently solicits us to good by the apprehension of evil: it also gives wings to the soul on which it rapidly ascends to the summit of perfection. Consequently, it is most important that we should excite and maintain it within our hearts. To attain this desirable end, let us reflect on the rigorous account we shall have to render after death, and the risk we run of losing our souls if we do not practise solid virtue.

Article I.

Of the rigorous account we shall have to render after death.

This account, which God shall one day demand of us, is already a subject of dread to the faithful soul who reflects—1, on the anguish which precedes the moment in which it shall have to quit this life; 2, on the examination it shall have to undergo; 3, on the unimpeachable authority of the witnesses that shall give evidence against

it; 4, and lastly, on the severity of the irrevocable sentence which shall be pronounced.

1. *The anguish which precedes judgment at the hour of death.*

Scripture offers us several instances of the overwhelming desolation of the sinner at the approach of death. The unjust steward who 'had wasted his master's goods,'[1] the foolish virgins 'who did not take oil with them,'[2] the slothful servant 'who hid in the earth the talent that had been confided to him,'[3] symbolise a soul to whom God has granted the most powerful succours for the attainment of sanctity, but who, through a criminal sloth, has neglected to turn them to account, or has even completely abused them. What has not this disobedient and ungrateful soul to fear? 'Thou canst be steward no longer,'[4] 'the door is shut, I know thee not,'[5] are the awful precursors, the dreadful harbingers of the sentence which shall one day be pronounced against it. The terror of the wicked steward, the anguish of the slothful servant, the desolation of the foolish virgins at the time of the terrible wrath of their master and spouse, are a striking picture of the fear and horror which shall seize upon and torment the culprit in punishment for having forgotten the care of his perfection. The horror of the impious Balthasar 'when there appeared, as it were, the fingers of a hand writing on the wall,' the sudden alteration of his countenance, the shuddering through all his limbs, the 'loosening of the joints of his loins,' the convulsive trembling of 'his knees striking against each other,'[6] the consternation of his soul, was but a shadow, a faint indication of the

[1] Luke xvi. 1. [2] Matt. xxv. 3. [3] Ibid. xxv. 25.
[4] Luke xvi. 1. [5] Matt. xxv. 12. [6] Dan. v. 5, 6.

tremendous fear which shall secretly torment, shall rend in anticipation, the soul of the sinner when, on the point of appearing at the bar of divine justice, he recalls his criminal contempt of grace and virtue. I say secretly: because, in order that the figure might be more complete, Balthasar alone, according to the opinion of several doctors, saw the mysterious hand that traced the decree of his condemnation in unknown characters on the wall: this fearful vision was concealed from the courtiers who surrounded him: but they concluded from his terror, the deadly pallor of his countenance, and his cries, which resounded through the palace, that he had been struck by an awful apparition.

This is a close approximation to what occurs to those new prodigal children who squander grace, and concern themselves but little about their santification. They alone behold with the eye of their conscience the hand of divine justice writing 'against them the decree of its wrath:'[1] the tempest which interiorly agitates their soul at that momentous crisis is invisible to those who surround their death-bed; but the fearful and haggard movement of the culprit's eyes, the perspiration which covers his brow, the shuddering of his limbs, the contortion of his features, betray with silent eloquence the interior dismay, the horror and desolation which rack his soul.

A long catalogue might be given, of even religious persons who, for having resisted holy inspirations, and neglected their spiritual advancement, fell into such fearful anxiety at the hour of death on reflecting on the rigorous account they would soon have to render, that the assistants sometimes feared to see them become the

[1] Job xiii. 26.

victims of despair. The reason is that the time of retaliation is come, and the grace we have despised arms itself with remorse to avenge itself upon us.

St. Jerome relates that St. Hilarion, being on the point of death, and experiencing deep uneasiness concerning his eternal destiny, only encouraged himself to confidence with a kind of diffidence: 'Go forth, my soul,' said he, 'what fearest thou? Go forth, do not hesitate. What! Thou hast served Jesus Christ for nearly seventy years and thou fearest death!' My God! if the language of Hilarion, that man of consummate sanctity, who had spent seventy years in severe penance, is that of fear, what shall we sinners say? If this illustrious anchorite trembles for his salvation at the hour of death, if he is filled with apprehension at the approach of judgment, what shall not we have to dread, we who, called to perfection, have steeled our hearts; who, by the obstinate abuse of grace, have grovelled so long in the mire of our evil habits? Oh, how intimidated and anxious shall our soul be; how disturbed shall it be in our last moments! and how terrible a preparation are those first disquietudes for the account which remains for us to render!

2. *The rigorous examination which our Judge will make.*

However, those anticipated fears of a soul in its last agony are but a faint picture of the consternation which shall take possession of it on its entrance into eternity, when it shall appear before the dread Tribunal to be judged. Then shall commence an awful scene, in which severity on the one side and anguish and dismay on the other shall predominate over every other sentiment.

Justice alone, unmitigated by mercy, shall occupy the throne of vengeance, the Omnipotent shall brandish His sword, the Judge shall be the 'God who is not a respecter of persons,'[1] who does not allow Himself to be influenced by favour or moved by compassion, or bribed by money, or appeased by tardy satisfaction;[2] 'the God to whom all secrets are laid open, all the mysteries of the soul revealed, by whom all darkness is enlightened, before whom silence itself gives evidence, and the soul gives testimony without the intervention of words.'[3] This infinitely wise, severe, inexorable Judge; this Judge, whose indignation will increase in proportion to our negligence in the practice of virtue, 'will contend with thee in judgment.'[4] Oh, faithless soul, 'He will reprove thee, He will set before thy face,'[5] and 'He will bring to judgment all the things that thou hast done.'[6] He will deduct what thou hast returned from what He has given thee, and will decide with strict justice what still remains for thee to pay. Withdrawing the thick veil which shrouds thy conscience, He will unite in one picture, irradiated by heavenly light, all the years of thy life with all the continuity of graces which thou hast abused, so that with a single glance thou wilt behold them clearly and distinctly.

'The brightness of God,' says the apostle, 'will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of our hearts:[7] more piercing than any two-edged sword, it will reach into the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joints also and the marrow.' The divine eye which discerns the thoughts

[1] Acts x. 34. [2] St. Aug. on Creed. [3] St. Chrys. Homil.
[4] Jerem. ii. 35. [5] Ps. xlix. 21. [6] Eccli. xii. 14.
[7] 1 Cor. iv. 5.

and intents of the heart,[1] shall, as the apostle here insinuates, make, with the rapidity of lightning, a complete anatomy of our soul. As the skilful anatomist knows how to seek out with the scalpel even the minutest fibres which enter into the structure of the body, to distinguish the difference between them and understand the nature and properties of each, so 'the God who searcheth the reins and hearts'[2] will bring to the scrutiny of our lives, the analysis of our acts, that vivid light which dissipates all shadows and mysteries. By the torch of His wisdom He will examine in detail all the faculties of our soul, and their operations with all the defects which have accompanied them. He will unfold to view the multitude and the malice of these defects. He will recall to our minds each separate opportunity which we have possessed of attaining perfection and practising virtue. He will manifest to us, without a possibility of our disowning it, all the holy inspirations and all the succours of grace that have been afforded us. What time has buried in oblivion, what the depravity of our nature has contemned as scruples, what the indulgence of our spiritual guides, the customs of the world, the hurry of business, the seductions of the heart, have extenuated, excused, even absolved in our own eyes, shall all be cited anew to the examen and weighed in a just balance. At present our conscience is as a paper written on, but folded and crumpled, which presents only illegible characters and some unconnected syllables, of which we cannot decipher the meaning; but then this book shall be opened, it shall be exposed to all eyes, and they shall be able to read there distinctly the whole history of our life and perceive all its circum-

[1] Heb. iv. 12. [2] Apoc. ii. 23.

stances in their minutest details. Oh, what a fearful picture shall then meet our gaze! our own sins and the sins of others of which we may have been the cause and which we have never confessed; our omissions in the discharge of our duties, our negligences, of which we did not even suspect ourselves guilty—what do I say? the very virtues and good works which we imagined we had performed, all shall combine to overwhelm us with confusion and dismay. In presence of the Sun of Justice 'all our justices shall appear as soiled linen.'[1] The fruits of virtue which we persuaded ourselves were worthy of being presented at the table of the Bridegroom, shall appear to us but as 'bad figs, very bad;[2] grapes of gall, and most bitter grapes,'[3] fit only to attract upon us the wrath of God instead of entitling us to His rewards.

Our actions, to be meritorious in the sight of God, must be good in their nature, their motive, their end, and the manner in which they are performed. The absence of a single one of these conditions suffices to render them defective and reprehensible. A commencement of tepidity, of inordinate attachment, of vain glory, increasing and gaining strength in our heart, will, perhaps, soon corrupt them in their basis, and, by a fatal transmutation, such an action, which might have won a title to glory for us, is liable to become the source of our shame and misfortune.

But, if we measure all our works by this rule, shall we find even one of them irreproachable? 'Alas!' cries out St. Gregory the Great, 'subjected to the scrutiny of divine justice, our justice shall be but injustice, and the eye of the Judge will dim the splendour with which, we

[1] Isaias lxiv. 6. [2] Jerem. xxiv. 3. [3] Deut. xxxii. 32.

flattered ourselves, we had invested it while performing it.' Oh, heavens! what we called zeal for the glory of God shall appear to have been but the desire of our own glory; what we regarded as the offspring of wisdom, fortitude, and temperance, shall be rejected as so many acts of dissimulation, obstinacy, and avarice; what we now adorn with the mantle of charity, discretion, renunciation, will reveal to every view, when the veil shall be withdrawn, nothing but immortification, revenge, and sensual gratification. In a word, we shall behold with mournful astonishment that those very actions on which we had plumed ourselves, and on which we had rested our hopes, have been worthless straw, which an expiatory fire will quickly consume: we shall see that when we might have exalted them to the rank of supernatural actions, their merit has been deteriorated by our negligence in tending to perfection, by our criminal resistance of countless graces, of which we shall then have to render an account so much the more severe for that we have taken so little care to profit by them.

Now, in our thoughtlessness, we feel no more regret for the irreparable loss of so many salutary inspirations which might have conducted us to sublime sanctity, than at the melting of a snowflake; we laugh at it as at a trifle; but what a revulsion of feelings we shall experience when, by the light of the mortuary candle and of the day of eternity which approaches, recognising our error, we shall see ourselves on the point of appearing before an exasperated Judge, and of rendering Him an account of our contempt of grace and virtue!

Oh, with what harrowing fear shall we be filled when these appalling words shall break upon our ear: count, weigh, separate. Count the graces which have been

granted thee during thy life . . . . how great is their number! . . . weigh their value in the scales of the sanctuary . . . . it is inestimable and infinite. Separate the good use from the abuse thou hast made of them . . . . Alas! how much the latter exceeds the former! Compare the numberless aids which have been lavished on thee, with the unpardonable indifference with which thou hast received them; compare their value with the little esteem thou hast set on them; consider the degree of virtue to which thou mightest have attained, and that at which thou hast stopped short. What shall we say to these reproaches which our Judge shall make to justify His wrath? Let us reflect: what reply shall we be able to make?

We must bear in mind that at that tremendous moment no excuse will be admitted. All those sophisms, specious motives, mendacious reasons, with which we palliated our culpable rejection of grace and our forgetfulness of perfection during life, shall vanish as a shadow in presence of the divine light. Tears and prayers shall no longer avail us, for 'the time of mercy shall be passed.'[1] No place of refuge shall remain to us, for the divine justice, 'high as the mountain and deep as the abyss,'[2] shall encompass us on all sides. At that terrible moment we would gladly give a thousand kingdoms and all the treasures of the world for one single inspiration of the Holy Ghost; but we shall not obtain it. We would consent to undergo the torments of purgatory for long years to purchase one ray of grace at that price; but our desire shall be unavailing. We shall cry out amid groans of anguish: 'Oh! if one hour, one brief moment were granted to me!' But that moment shall

[1] Ps. ci. 14. [2] Ibid. xxxv. 7.

not be given, 'time shall be no longer.'[1] When those graces were at our disposal we would not profit by them; now by a just retaliation they are withdrawn from us when we would fain be faithful to them. The abuse of so many graces, and the contempt of virtue which we might easily have carried to a high degree, is then the motive most calculated to aggravate the rigour of the judgment we shall have to undergo, and to render it more dreadful to us.

3. *The unimpeachable authority of the witnesses.*

Two veracious witnesses shall depose against us at this judgment. We shall alone sustain their accusations. Their crushing testimony shall augment the severity of the account we shall have to render. These two witnesses are our faith and our conscience: they are 'the books' which shall be opened 'in presence of the Throne, on the contents of which the dead shall be judged according to their works.'[2] Yes, unfortunate soul! thy conscience, in concert with reason, shall accuse thee as man; thy faith shall testify against thee as a Christian: the latter will recall the dogmas thou hast believed, the former the helps of which thou hast been the recipient; the one will exclaim: thou shouldst have become a saint, and a great saint; the other will add, thou couldst have done so in consequence of the truths thou hast known; thou couldst have done so owing to the graces that have been lavished on thee. Thou shouldst have done so on account of thy vocation to the religious state and to the priesthood, on account of the important office which thou hast filled; thou couldst have done so on account of the numberless graces attached to thy state,

[1] Apoc. x. 6. [2] Ibid. xx. 12.

the opportunities thou hast had of practising virtue, and the edifying example of many others, who, in the same condition, place, and even employment as thou, have attained to the perfection of justice. In a word, thou couldst and shouldst have aspired to high sanctity. Such shall be the testimony of thy faith, thy conscience and thy reason combined, a testimony confirmed by the irrevocable sentence which shall be pronounced by the eternal and thrice-holy God. What harrowing confusion shall we not experience at that moment when, fully convinced of the truth of these depositions, we shall be compelled to acknowledge that, notwithstanding the aids granted to us, we have lived only as indifferent Christians? That our heart has been 'that field of the slothful man all covered with nettles;[1] 'that vineyard' of the foolish man 'from which they looked for good fruit, and which has only brought forth wild grapes;'[2] that barren 'fig-tree'[3] of the Gospel, which has so long disappointed the expectations of the father of the family.

Oh, my soul! how great shall be thy consternation when thou shalt behold thyself as an accursed vineyard about to be trampled under the feet of beasts: bereft of the hedge and wall, cut down and cast into devouring flames! When thou shalt find thyself repulsed by the saints, whose example thou hast disdained; by thy angel guardian, whose counsels thou hast despised; by the Mother of all goodness, whose protection thou hast slighted; and lastly, by thy own 'conscience, whose testimony shall justify[4] the indignation of 'all creatures armed against thee for vengeance!'[5] What will become of thee when He who is mercy itself, who has so tenderly

[1] Prov. xxiv. 31. [2] Isaias v. 24. [3] Luke xiii. 7.
[4] Rom. ii. 15. [5] Wisd. v. 13.

borne with thee till now, averting His face from thee, harshly repulses thee from His throne of clemency to deliver thee up to the tribunal of justice; when, reproaching thee with thy apathy in the practice of virtue, He pronounces an awful and irrevocable sentence against thee, and invokes all the rigours of divine wrath to avenge His outraged justice?

4. *The severity of the sentence.*

With what awful consternation shall we not be seized when we behold the 'Ancient of days seated on His throne of fire, and a swift stream of fire issuing forth from before Him!'[1] When we hear this great God from the midst of thunder and lightning 'pronouncing His judgments'[2] against us, and appealing to heaven and earth as arbiters of the equity of His decrees. 'Judge between me and my vineyard, what is there that I could do' more 'for my vineyard that I have not done to it?'[3] Oh, ungrateful souls! 'I have called you' to great perfection, to a high degree of sanctity, and 'you have refused me;'[4] I have loaded you with numberless and infinitely precious graces purchased at the price of my blood, and you have despised them. 'I have loved you with an everlasting love;'[5] 'I have protected you as the apple of my eye;'[6] 'I have carried you in my bosom as the nurse is wont to carry the little infant,'[7] 'and you have forsaken me;'[8] 'you have repaid me evil for good and hatred for my love,'[9] 'these things you have done and I was silent;'[10] 'I have kept silence, I have been patient,'[11] for long years; but now 'I will speak as a man

[1] Dan. vii. 9, 10. [2] Jerem. i. 16. [3] Isaias v. 4. [4] Prov. i. 24.
[5] Jerem. xxxi. 3. [6] Deut. xxxii. 6. [7] Numb. xi. 12. [8] Judges x. 13.
[9] Ps. cviii. 5. [10] Ibid. xlix. 21. [11] Isaias xlii. 14.

in the extremity of pain, I will destroy and annihilate all.'[1] 'In the day of my revenge'[2] 'I will pour upon you my indignation and all my fierce anger.'[3] I will say to the ministers of my justice: 'take away from him his talent and cast the unprofitable servant into exterior darkness'[4] that he may expiate in devouring flames his culpable neglect of solid virtue.

What shall be our thoughts at this moment? 'Oh, tepid soul,' cries out St. Bernard, 'if thou awakest not completely, if thou tremblest not at the sound of these awful denunciations, thou art buried, not in sleep but in death.'[5] 'For,' continues the same saint, 'what is there more to be feared, what is more calculated to fill us with anxiety and mortal terror, than the idea of presenting ourselves before the awful tribunal to be judged, and to await the irrevocable decree of so rigid a Judge?'[6]

'O God! whose wrath none can resist,'[7] 'to whose eyes all things are naked and open;'[8] 'what shall I do when Thou shalt rise to judge, and when thou shalt examine what shall I answer Thee?'[9] 'Who shall withstand Thy judgment!'[10] 'The Lord is wise in heart and mighty in strength: what am I then that I should answer Him or have words with Him?'[11] 'Alas! the heavens are not pure in His sight, and He has found stains in His angels'[12] since 'no man living shall be justified in His presence,'[13] how should I not fear these withering reproaches: 'I find not thy works full:'[14] 'thou art weighed in the balance and art found wanting.'[15] For this reason, Lord, 'my bones have trembled with fear, and my soul is filled with terror when Thy judgments befall me.'[16] Never-

[1] Isaias xlii. 14. [2] Ibid. xxxiv. 8. [3] Sophon. iii. 8. [4] Matt. xxv. 28, 30.
[5] Serm. on Cant. [6] Serm. on Ps. xc. [7] Job ix. 13.
[8] Heb. iv. 13. [9] Job xxxi. 14. [10] Wisd. xii. 12.
[11] Job ix. 4, 14. [12] Imit. b. iii. ch. 44. [13] Ps. cxlii. 4.
[14] Apoc. iii. 3. [15] Dan. v. 27. [16] Imit. b. iii. ch. 14.

theless, as the rigorous account I shall one day have to render should I have neglected my perfection is a powerful stimulus to labour strenuously for its attainment, 'pierce my flesh' more and more 'with Thy fear, that I may fear Thy judgments still more,'[1] and soften its severity by leading a more holy life.

Article II.

Of the danger of our being lost.

1. *There are some who will be lost if they do not attain to high sanctity.*

Whatever reason we may have to tremble in reflecting on the rigorous account they shall have to render who abuse grace, instead of making it tend to their sanctification, the danger to which the greater number of those who neglect to acquire solid virtue expose themselves is a motive no less calculated to inspire us with a salutary fear. Such a danger appears to us so much the more probable in that the Holy Ghost seems to wish to warn us of it in several places of Scripture, and that we may regard it as a certain truth that there are men who shall be damned if they do not become perfect: men for whom there is no medium, who if they do not attain a high degree of sanctity shall be lost. Let us explain our proposition.

God, the supreme Arbiter of our destiny, has determined that for certain souls, salvation can be attainable only on the condition of their rendering themselves worthy to occupy a more or less high place in heaven, if not of the first, at least of the second, third, or even the last rank. He does not call them absolutely and exclusively to such a special degree of more exalted

[1] Ps. cxviii. 120.

glory, so that, according to His decree, they shall not be excluded from heaven for having neglected to acquire a superior merit: they may still be admitted there in an inferior, or even in the lowest rank which God destined for them; not, however, that God is resolved with an unlimited determination to save them, nor that they can authorise themselves to an indefinite imperfection in corresponding with grace; but the Divine Goodness deigns to allow them a certain latitude in this point within the limits of which they will work out their salvation.

I shall presume to say, suiting the counsels of Almighty Wisdom to the weak compass of human understanding, that the sovereign Master forms this resolution within Himself: I destine such a sublime throne in heaven for this soul should it correspond faithfully with all the graces which I will bestow upon it; should it, on the contrary, resist some of them and only correspond with the more considerable ones, I will still admit it to heaven, but to a lower place.

Let us see whether such are in effect the designs of God with regard to a great number of souls. The greater number of saints, had they corresponded with perfect fidelity to all the graces conferred on them, without ever resisting any, would now enjoy a more perfect felicity. But having through human frailty sometimes turned a deaf ear to the divine inspirations, they possess a less brilliant crown, and occupy a less resplendent throne; though it is certain that in the designs of God they were destined to a more sublime rank, had not their weakness and inconstancy occasionally rendered them unfaithful. It is true, therefore, that God, in predestining them from the commencement to a high degree of glory, did not wish to deprive them of an inferior one

should they not fully correspond with their first election.

There are souls, on the contrary, whom God prevents with special graces, whom He loves with a more special love, 'whom He bears graven on His hands and incessantly before His eyes,'[1] souls whom He calls so absolutely to such a degree of eternal glory, that if they do not attain to it by a corresponding degree of perfection never shall they partake in the happiness of the saints, even in an inferior grade. Here again we shall take the liberty of portraying the Almighty to ourselves as issuing forth His irrevocable decree: I will grant to such a soul a determined number of the most precious graces; should it by the good use it makes of them arrive at such a degree of sanctity, I will also elevate it to a corresponding perfection of the intuitive vision. But should it ungratefully defeat the excess of My bounty by neglecting to practise such particular virtues in their perfection, not only will I not grant this sublime glory to which I have destined it, but I will even withdraw My efficacious graces from it; I will allow it to fall into and die in mortal sin, and thus perish eternally.

For such souls, then, there is no medium: if they are not perfect in sanctity, they shall be reprobates; if they are not first in the kingdom of heaven they shall occupy no place there; if they fail to become perfect they shall be lost. God has so absolutely attached their final perseverance to this degree of justice that, failing to attain it, they shall be deprived of victorious graces, and shall not gain any degree of sanctity; on the contrary, they shall fall into sin and forfeit their salvation. Scripture is replete with examples which prove that God in His

[1] Isaias xlix. 16.

adorable and inscrutable designs has from all eternity resolved to pursue this conduct in their regard. We read in the Gospel that Jesus Christ 'calling unto Him a little child set him in the midst of His disciples and said to them: Amen I say to you, unless you be converted and become as little children you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.'[1] That is to say, as Lyranus interprets it, 'unless you be converted from your ambition and become as little children by imitating their docility, unless you generously exert yourselves to acquire that sublime degree of submission which naturally characterises children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.' Here our Saviour threatens His disciples, not merely with being excluded from the rank of great saints and the first heralds of the Christian faith, but He likewise menaces them with a total exclusion from His kingdom.

We may reason thus: the apostles would have perished eternally had they not hearkened to the admonitions of Jesus Christ; this, without doubt, is the meaning of the decisive words 'unless you become as children you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.' Now, in all probability this exclusion would not have been the direct and immediate result of the ambition which then predominated over them and originated their dispute concerning the priority of rank, since it is a unanimous opinion of theologians that this reprehensible desire of superiority did not amount to mortal sin. And yet they would have been eternally exiled from heaven had they not observed, from the first, that degree of humility to which a special inspiration of grace, and the word of their divine Master incited them. Assuredly this one defect, as it then existed in the apostles, was not sufficient cause for their

[1] Matt. xviii. 3.

perdition; and nevertheless God had so attached their eternal happiness to a certain determinate degree of perfection, that a neglect of the acquisition of it would have led them into mortal sin, and finally into the irreparable ruin of their souls. It is certain, therefore, that there may be souls who shall be lost should they not arrive at the perfection to which God invites them, since the apostles themselves, our masters and doctors in the faith, were not exempted from this fearful alternative.

But the following is a still more striking proof of this truth. Our Lord, addressing St. Peter before the last supper, said to him: 'If I wash thee not thou shalt have no part with Me.'[1] St. Peter's opposition to the desire of our Saviour: 'Thou shalt never wash my feet,'[2] though blameworthy, has been always excused from mortal sin; however, several interpreters, particularly Salmeron, Lyranus, Simon of Cassia, after St. Augustine and St. Basil, believe that by these words: 'Thou shalt have no part with Me,' Jesus Christ threatened His apostle with the loss of his soul. Consequently, had not St. Peter removed the obstacle to his sanctification by overcoming the repugnance suggested by misplaced humility, and thus reached to the degree of blind obedience to which the will of his Master called him, instead of the eminent glory which he now enjoys, he would have been condemned to everlasting flames. Let us then a second time conclude that for some there is no medium: if they do not merit to be the first in heaven they will not even enjoy the last places.

A third example, also taken from the Gospel, gives new strength to our opinion. Our Lord wished to call a young man to high sanctity, and He deigned to do so in

[1] John xiii. 8. [2] Ibid.

these terms: 'If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give it to the poor, and come follow Me. And when the young man had heard this word, he went away sad: for he had great possessions. Then Jesus said to His disciples! Amen I say to you, that a rich man shall hardly enter the kingdom of heaven; it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.'[1]

Oh, fearful words! by which the eternal Wisdom teaches us that this young man, although he had preserved his innocence unspotted until then, had just exposed his salvation to imminent peril by refusing to tend to the perfection to which God called him.

This it was that was signified by the mournful glance which the Saviour then cast upon him and by the sigh with which He uttered the sad words: 'How difficult it is for such men to enter the kingdom of heaven! it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.' Alas! these words forcibly express how perilous is the position of the soul of that poor young man! And, according to several authors, there is reason to believe that he really incurred damnation.

O God! this young man entertained an ardent desire of salvation. 'What good shall I do,' said he, 'that I may have life everlasting; what is yet wanting to me? He had kept all the commandments from his youth:' he had never committed mortal sin, he had preserved his innocence intact: 'Jesus Christ looking at him had loved him' for his purity of heart. And yet it is considered with much probability that he afterwards fell into mortal sin and perished eternally for having resisted his vocation to great sanctity. The reason is, that for him also there was no medium between sublime holiness and perdition.

[1] Matt. xix. 21 and fol.

A similar fate awaited the Bishop of Ephesus, had he not hearkened to the admonition given him by St. John on the part of God: 'These things saith He who holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them that are evil. Thou hast endured much for my name and hast not fainted, and thou hatest the actions of the Nicolaites; but I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first charity. Be mindful, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and do penance; or else I will come to thee and will move thy candlestick out of its place.'[1] Such are the awful menaces which the Almighty commands St. John to make to this bishop. Cornelius à Lapide, and many other interpreters, believe this bishop to have been St. Timothy, the beloved disciple of St. Paul. His hatred of vice, his zeal and suffering for the glory of God, his patience in bearing adversity for the sake of the faith, were such as to merit the most magnificent eulogiums from Jesus Christ in this very place: on the contrary, the defect with which he is reproached does not amount to a venial sin: it was the commencement of tepidity, a slight diminution of the fervour with which he had first devoted himself to God and the salvation of souls.

And still had he not promptly divested himself of his apathy, and constantly tended to perfection, he was threatened on the part of God with the removal of his candlestick.'[2] Some commentators, it is true, think that

[1] Apoc. ii. 1 and fol.

[2] It seems that this bishop had relaxed in preaching the word of God in his zeal for the conversion of the Ephesians, owing to the resistance of the Jews and Gentiles, who paid idolatrous worship to Diana of Ephesus. Whether through weakness and tepidity, human prudence

the change of candlestick signifies degradation from the episcopate[1] and other canonical penalties to which the tepid minister would have been subjected had he not done penance; but many believe with as much reason that this expression should be understood as referring to the loss of his soul if, instead of returning to his former fervour, he had continued to relax in perfection. But what reply shall those evangelical labourers make, who, notwithstanding the spiritual torpor in which they are plunged and the lamentable habit they have contracted of fulfilling their religious exercises with carelessness and sloth, still flatter themselves with the hope of an everlasting recompense, because they labour much for God, prevent disorders, and suffer many adversities. The Bishop of Ephesus had performed these and many still more excellent works, and yet he was not the less liable to lose his salvation had he not laboured with more fervour and constancy for the acquisition of very high perfection. The reason is, that 'the judgments of God are a profound abyss,'[2] they are equally adorable and awful, but the more dreadful for that similar examples are of daily occurrence.

St. Teresa, that virgin so enlightened in the ways of God, so illustrious for her virtues and piety, understood by a vision accorded to her by the divine mercy, that hell would be her portion unless she broke off some over-familiar though innocent relations which existed between her and one of her friends, and if, content with

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or the desire of peace, he began to labour less strenuously and lost a little of his first zeal for the promulgation of the Gospel: but this inconsiderable relaxation only amounted to a venial sin.—Cornelius a Lapide, 'Commentary on the Apoc.'

[1] I will remove your candlestick; that is to say, I will deprive you of your see, you shall no longer be its bishop.—Ibid.

[2] Ps. xxxv. 7.

the ordinary virtue she practised, she omitted to aspire higher. A new proof that there are some souls who must belong wholly to God, or they can have no part with Him.

Besides, if it is certain that there are many in the world who are called to the religious state and who imperil their salvation by disobeying their vocation, why should it not be equally credible that those who are called to a more exalted sanctity incur a similar risk when they close their ears to the pressing solicitations of the Divine voice? If infidelity to the religious vocation is not free from danger to salvation, how can infidelity to the particular grace which inspires us to practise solid virtue fail to terrify us? It is therefore quite consistent with the principles of reason, and is even proved by facts, that for many there is no medium: if they are not great saints, never shall they behold the face of God.

2. *It is probable that we are of that number.*

The talents we have received, the precious and numberless graces that have been lavished on us; the continual and powerful aids that have been bestowed on us for the acquisition of virtue; finally, the special providence which has conducted us from our earliest youth through so many wonderful circumstances, and notwithstanding so many obstacles and such multiform dangers, to a kind of life in which our vocation expressly obliges us under the pain of mortal sin to tend to perfection, are so many conclusive arguments that we are probably of the number of those who shall be either great saints or reprobates. To so many proofs let us add the perpetual lights and inspirations which incite us to holiness,

the remorse of conscience which accuses and condemns our tepidity. These are convincing proofs that God demands more of us than of many others, and that He likewise menaces our resistance with more rigorous chastisements.

Since 'God ordereth all things sweetly, and reacheth from end to end mightily,' 'so, when He destines a man for anything great,' says St. Bernardine of Siena, 'He gives him all the means necessary for the attainment of that end: hence, we must conclude that when His adorable Providence has combined great qualifications for success in any individual, He intends without doubt to demand great and generous actions of him. When the Lord appointed Moses and Josue, the one the legislator, the other the leader of His people; Jeremias a prophet of Israel; John the precursor of the Messiah; Joseph the guardian and protector of Jesus, He bestowed abundantly upon them all the qualities and virtues that their exalted missions required; but He at the same time exacted from them a sublime sanctity, an heroic fidelity, an unalterable perseverance in well-doing. And who can tell but that they would have been deprived of eternal happiness had they failed to correspond sufficiently with the intentions of God?

But gratitude prohibits our ignoring the signal favours and powerful aids with which the Almighty ceases not to surround us. Edifying examples, religious instructions, pious books, retreats, charitable admonitions, daily meditation, examen of conscience, the frequentation of the sacraments, are so many evidences of God's fidelity in enabling us to make solid progress in perfection. Now, as this adorable Author of all good cannot grant us the graces and helps necessary for any end whatsoever with-

out proposing to Himself the accomplishing of that end, is it not clear that His object in bestowing so many graces on us is that He invites us to great sanctity? And have we not then reason to conclude also that God has perhaps destined us by such an express will for such a sublime degree of eternal felicity, that if we do not positively obtain this high place in heaven by the practice of great sanctity on earth, we shall not even be admitted to an inferior rank, but that, on the contrary, that efficacious grace shall be withdrawn from us, and we shall fall into mortal sin and be lost for ever. In a word, should we not fear to expose ourselves to the imminent danger of losing our salvation if we neglect to acquire solid virtue?

Reason forbids our leaving anything to chance in an affair of this importance: faith tells us that where there is question of eternity we should select the most secure means; and the charity we owe our souls earnestly implores us not to expose it to the danger of an irreparable ruin. It is not certain that a mediocre virtue will save us; on the contrary, we have every reason to believe that we are of the number of those who, if they are not great saints, shall be damned; we would therefore be guilty of an inexcusable imprudence, an utter insanity, did we not endeavour to secure interests of such momentous importance. 'God,' we say, 'may not perhaps have resolved to act thus in our regard: perhaps He has not attached our salvation to such a precise degree of sanctity that wanting it we cannot be permitted to enter heaven in an inferior one.' Perhaps . . . . Oh, what a lamentable word! perhaps God has not resolved, has not attached! . . . But perhaps also He has resolved, perhaps he has attached . . . . Will

we then stake our eternity on a perhaps? . . . will we risk heaven for an event so uncertain?

Oh, the madness of men! In our alliances, our transactions, in lending money, we take the greatest precautions, we require the amplest securities. But in the affair of salvation we are satisfied with uncertainty, the risk we run gives us no concern. Ah! I conjure thee who meditatest on these truths not to inflict on thyself an injury which may endure eternally: yield to my entreaties, choose the wiser part. For, although thou art ignorant whether thou be of those for whom there is no middle course, although possibly the mercy of God may have resolved to treat thee with more lenity; still thou wilt never repent of thy perseverance and the efforts thou hast made to tend to perfection: whereas thou mayest perhaps eternally bewail thy negligence. It is a positive fact that a similar sloth has ruined many and caused regret to thousands. For thy part engrave this salutary maxim indelibly in thy heart: 'there are some who, if they are not great saints, shall be lost.' Then add, 'it is even probable that I am of that number owing to the precious and multiplied gifts that I have received both from nature and grace: I should apprehend the being damned should I not become perfect.' Weigh these reflections, and see what thou art determined to do. Thy immortal soul is the stake; the means of ensuring salvation is solid virtue. Unless Thou labour courageously and generously for the acquisition of this virtue, thou art threatened with an eternal expatriation from heaven. From these premisses judge what resolution thou shouldst form. O God! 'terrible in Thy counsels over the sons of men!'[1] I fear Thy Judgments,'[2]

[1] Ps. lxv. 5. [2] Ibid. cxviii. 120.

because they are 'a profound abyss.'[1] But I fear my malice still more. It is that which exposes me to the rigorous account I shall have to give and to the danger of losing my soul. But, my God, 'the abyss' of my malice 'calls upon the abyss'[2] of Thy mercy. Grant me grace 'to work out my salvation with fear and trembling,'[3] and by good works 'to make my election sure.'[4] Grant that I may 'walk circumspectly, not as unwise but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days' of my past life 'are evil.'[5] Grant me the courage to apply myself as far as possible to the attainment of perfection, lest I hear this fearful decree issued against me: 'Behold, I will stretch out my hand upon thee and will take away thy justification.'[6]

Article III.

Of the means of mitigating the severity of the account we shall have to render, and of avoiding the danger of being lost.

The fear of the evils induced by the neglect of perfection can only be salutary and efficacious, in so far as it is a practical not a sterile fear, a fear which determines us to study the remedies of these evils in order that, by a judicious application of them, we may insure the cure of our soul and destroy the cause of the terror of which it might be the prey on leaving this world. It is with this object in view that I am about to point out some means of softening the rigour of the account we shall have to give and of averting the danger of perdition.

[1] Ps. xxxv. 7. [2] Ibid. xli. 8. [3] Philipp. ii. 12.
[4] 2 Pet. viii. 10. [5] Ephes. iii. 15. [6] Ezech. xvi. 27.

1. *Means of mitigating the severity of the sentence we shall have to undergo.*

The first means of preventing the severe account we shall have to give, is to contract the habit of performing each of our actions with as much attention and care as if we were to die immediately afterwards, and be summoned before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, 'where every one will receive the proper things of the body according as he hath done, whether good or evil.'[1] St. Cyprian formerly gave the same advice to his people: 'Perform all your actions,' says he, 'as if you were about to appear before the Judge to render an account of them.'

St. Hilary likewise applauds this practice: 'Happy shall he be,' says he, 'who shall perform all his actions with the thought of an immediate judgment.'[2] 'There is nothing,' adds St. Ambrose, 'more conducive to a regular and holy life' than the belief 'of having one day for the judge of all our works, Him who beholds what is secret, who is displeased at our faults, and applauds a virtuous life.' In effect, can we imagine a man so utterly devoid of reason as to sin knowingly and willingly at the very moment that he firmly believes that God will speedily judge his action and severely punish anything that may be defective in it? If sin is so common and universal, it is, says Isaias, because 'there is no one that thinketh in his heart;'[3] no one that meditates seriously on this oracle of Jesus Christ: 'All men shall render an account for every idle word they shall speak.'[4] Animated with a holy fear, let us obey the counsels we have just received, and perform each of our actions as if it was to be the last.

[1] 2 Cor. v. 10. [2] On Ps. cxviii. [3] Isaias lvii. 1. [4] Matt. xii. 36.

St. Augustine teaches us a second method of appeasing the wrath of the awful Scrutator of our life. 'Seat thyself,' says he, 'on the tribunal of thy conscience, and be thy own judge:'[1] be at once the accuser and the accused. Enter into the interior of thy soul and pronounce an impartial sentence. The apostle had already insisted on this in writing to the Corinthians: 'If we would judge ourselves,' says he, 'we should not be judged'[2] by the Almighty. 'Before the Judgment,' interrogate yourself and 'you will find favour with God,'[3] says Ecclesiasticus. Do we wish to practise these means befittingly, let us do now what an infinitely wise and equitable God shall one day do in His wrath. In that day He will investigate all our actions, He will punish all our faults. We shall fall into the hands of a God, light itself, who will know all, even to the minutest circumstances, an exasperated God who will punish all that He will find defective. Let us from this moment borrow the bright light of the infallible Judge to discover all our offences by a serious examination. Let us afterwards arm ourselves with the darts of this inexorable avenger, to punish ourselves voluntarily for our crimes and thus avert a second chastisement.

In the first place, let us examine our consciences with diligence and attention, in a place and time suitable to recollection: let us then by a sincere, candid, and entire confession, enable our director to understand all the intricacies of our heart, all that the interior voice reproaches us with, all that God sees there, all that the whole universe must behold there, on the great day of revelations. If we now make known all our sins to the minister of reconciliation in the same manner, with the

[1] On Ps. xlix. [2] 1 Cor. xi. 31. [3] Eccli. xviii. 20.

same perspicuity and as far as possible with the same distinction of number and species, with which all shall then be manifested to the whole human race; if we employ the same expressions in the accusation of our faults as the devil shall then make use of to reproach us with them; if we accuse ourselves of all our sins without exception, these which disturb and cause us most uneasiness, our secret sins and the sins of others of which we are the cause, the good we have omitted and the duties we have neglected, we may rest assured that such an examination and confession will give us unspeakable consolation at the hour of death.

In the second place, we must endeavour to appease the divine justice by an anticipated satisfaction, so that having borne in this life the punishment due to our sins, none shall remain to be suffered in the other. For 'divine vengeance,' says St. Anselm, 'has no longer anything whereon to exercise itself when it has been anticipated by the conversion and repentance of man.' According to the doctrine of St. Augustine, 'sin cannot remain unrequited, and it must be punished either by the sinner himself, or by an avenging God.' Now, God is infinitely just, never will He inflict a second penalty on the same fault, and if we have done penance for our sins He will not exact any other satisfaction.

Let us then punish ourselves, let us inflict on ourselves all the chastisements our infidelities deserve; this is the advice of St. John Chrysostom. 'Let us perform now a voluntary penance for our sins,' says he, 'and we shall not one day have to fear new torments.' 'It is better,' says the 'Imitation,' 'to purify ourselves from our sins now than to wait to expiate them in the other life.'[1] For in this life penance is light and of short

[1] Imit. b. i. ch. 24.

duration, in the other it shall be longer and more intolerable.

We possess three principal means of expiating our faults:—1, Frequently to elicit acts of perfect contrition; 2, to gain the indulgences granted by the Church; 3, to perform satisfactory works, such as almsgiving, patiently bearing our crosses, especially illness, afflicting our body by voluntary austerities, by the hair shirt, discipline, abstinence, fasts, and other corporeal mortifications.

Let us now consider what is our position with reference to all that we have just been meditating. Is our soul tortured by any remorse? Have we confessed all our sins with the proper dispositions? How are we resolved to act in future with regard to the means of satisfaction which have just been pointed out to us, for averting by a rigorous self-examination here below the tremendous account which shall be exacted of us hereafter, and of liquidating in this life by severe penance the debt we have contracted towards the divine justice? 'It cannot be doubted,' says St. Augustine, 'that God treats us with great condescension when He constitutes us in some sort the arbiters of the judgment that awaits us;' but should we not be our own most cruel enemies were we to neglect to profit by such wonderful clemency?

Since 'it is only before judgment,' says St. Gregory, 'that we can escape the severity of the Judge; and that once He is seated on His tribunal to examine us without mercy, there shall be no longer time to appease Him;' let us conclude with St. Bernard, 'that we must judge ourselves beforehand, and by this judgment in time provide against this terrible judgment that awaits us after death.'[1] 'For, to that judgment of God, at which,' says

[1] On Ps. xc.

St. Chrysostom, 'we may be cited at any moment, we shall have neither the strength to resist, nor the time to defend ourselves, nor the means of escape, nor the opportunity of concealing ourselves, nor the courage to appear; all satisfaction shall be unavailing, there shall be no longer room for mercy: in this intolerable anguish nothing shall remain for the sinner but utter wretchedness, consternation, and dismay at the apprehension of that awful sentence which shall cause the earth to totter on its foundations, and the pillars of heaven, that is to say, the holiest and wisest of men, to tremble.' Let us now, therefore, faithfully perform what we will then wish to have done: thus it is that we may diminish the rigour of the account we shall have to give.

2. *Means of avoiding the loss of our salvation.*

Another means well calculated to inspire us with fear, is the danger of losing our salvation; and we have already stated that it is probable a great number incur this risk who, being called to perfection, resist the voice of God. To escape so awful a danger let us now seek out, for the purpose of destroying them, the chief obstacles which impede and frequently nullify the efforts of our will in the pursuit of good. They are of two kinds: it is either some object to which we are too much attached and which we must give up, or some duty to which we are bound, but which we cannot resolve to perform. It is in these two points 'that the aversion to the difficulties and fatigue of combating which prevents many persons from advancing'[1] consists. This is the rock against which our good resolutions split; it is 'the lion in the road'[2] of virtue, which not only scares away countless

[1] Imit. b. i. ch. 25. [2] Prov. xxvi. 15.

souls and deters them from entering or persevering in it, but even causes them to recoil.

The remedy for this twofold evil, according to the 'Imitation,' 'is to tear ourselves violently from all that corrupt nature covets, and courageously strive to vanquish ourselves in all that is most painful and opposed to our inclinations.'[1] The severing of the chain which keeps us inordinately attached to a creature, the performance of an action to which we feel ourselves particularly solicited by the interior inspirations of grace, are as it were a triumphal arch through which we enter the royal road of sanctity after having shunned the perilous path that would have led us away from God. This important victory which we obtain over ourselves, this heroic action which we perform, are the foundation of a solid virtue, the prolific source of the most precious graces, the almost certain pledge of eternal felicity. A thousand instances of this truth occur in the lives of the saints, whose consummate virtue almost invariably originated in such beginnings. St. Martin, St. Walter, St. Francis Borgia, St. Francis Xavier, and countless others owed their conversion or their wonderful progress in virtue, the one to an alms of half his cloak given to a poor man, the other to a pardon granted to an enemy, this to the contempt of a court, that other to an act of mortification in sucking a loathsome ulcer. Yes; there is not a shadow of doubt that the heroic resolution to detach our heart from the love of creatures or to perform some very difficult action for the love of God may open for us the way to sanctity, and cause us to advance therein with rapid strides. These acts of virtue, particularly if persevered in generously, without ever looking

[1] Imit. b. i. ch. 25.

back, free us from the danger to which we may have been previously exposed, of losing our souls.

Let us, then, dare to be courageous at length; let us arm ourselves with the strength of Abraham about to immolate Isaac, and seizing the sword of the Spirit to strike a decisive blow, let us ask ourselves what is the creature, the place, person, honour, gratification which fetters and enthrals our soul and of which God demands the sacrifice. Let us search the depths of our conscience to examine what is the desire of which the Holy Ghost demands the immolation, and the moment we recognise it, arming ourselves with a holy zeal, a salutary self-hatred, let us candidly acknowledge our secret attachment, and depositing it on the altar of the cross, allow divine love to sacrifice it without delay. If our holocaust has been perfect, if we frequently reiterate it with undeviating fervour, we may confidently hope that, like Abraham, we shall be loaded with benedictions, that we shall have the happiness to hear these words: 'Because thou hast done this thing and hast not spared' this affection 'for my sake, I will bless thee and I will multiply' my graces for thee 'as the stars of heaven' and as the sand on the seashore. 'Thou shalt possess,' thy soul, and thy labours 'shall be blessed because thou hast obeyed my voice.'[1] Behold, then, the way in which we may ensure our eternal happiness, avert the rigorous account we should have to render, and the danger of forfeiting our salvation.

[1] Gen. xxii. 16.

CHAPTER III.

OF THE HOPE OF THE GOODS THAT ARE TO BE OBTAINED BY THE PRACTICE OF SOLID VIRTUE.

HAVING awakened in our soul a salutary fear of the dangers to which those are exposed who neglect their salvation, it is necessary to stimulate its courage and incite it to labour unremittingly for its sanctification by the hope of the rewards promised to solid virtue, and by the contemplation of the sweetness with which the practice of it abounds. The thought of the advantages which a true and perseverant piety obtains for us even in this life, is assuredly a powerful incentive to induce us to tend to sanctity. Witness the ancient patriarchs, and particularly the Royal Prophet, for whom the precious advantages attached to acts of virtue was an unfailing solace in adversity, a repose in fatigue, a refuge in danger, a shield in persecutions, an anchor, a port, a beacon in tempests, a spur and incentive to virtue. This confidence animated them in their spiritual weakness, strengthened them in their dejection, sustained them in their weakness, and stimulated them to walk constantly in the way of virtue.

To excite ourselves to follow constantly in the paths of sanctity, let us endeavour to understand the inestimable value of the fruits which we would reap from this confidence, and which are happiness in this life and peace and tranquillity at the hour of death. Such is the anticipated recompense which the goodness of God reserves for us as a foretaste of heaven. I say, there-

fore, that it is only those who devote themselves to their perfection who live happy and die in peace.

Article I.

Those alone live happy who devote themselves to their perfection.

It is impossible to conceive anything more dark, gloomy, and even dismal, than the picture which worldlings sometimes form to themselves of the life of persons devoted to virtue. They persist in refusing to view piety under any other aspect but that of an austere, emaciated spectre, furrowed with wrinkles, enveloped in hair-cloth, cruelly torn with the discipline, attenuated with fasts, plunged in affliction, and drowned in tears, always holding the stone in hand to strike its breast, ignoring consolation, and, in fine, strangers to all the pleasure and sweetness of life.

But how false is such a supposition! We are about to prove, on the contrary, that, despite the tempests and storms of this life, those who devote themselves to solid piety pass their days in an uninterrupted tranquillity and perfect happiness, based on the graces with which they are enriched, the true consolation with which they are inundated, and the care with which a divine and paternal Providence defends, governs, and preserves them. For God Himself labours for the happiness of His faithful servants, bestowing on them, even in this valley of tears, a foretaste of future blessings, with that loving tenderness which He testified to His people in the desert by feeding them with manna; with that exuberance of delight with which Jesus Christ inebriated His disciples on Mount Thabor.

First Proof.—The graces with which those are enriched who apply themselves to their perfection.

Those graces which, by an anticipated recompense, God bestows here below on perfect souls in a manner proportioned to their nature, bear an admirable relation to the four qualities with which glorified bodies shall one day shine. They are as four magnificent gates through which 'that peace' of conscience which surpasseth all understanding'[1] triumphantly enters our heart; and even as the darkness of our understanding, the apathy of our will, the revolt of our passions, the humiliating dulness of our memory, completely absorbed in the recollection of terrestrial things, like the 'four' devastating 'winds'[2] mentioned by Jeremias, blowing simultaneously from the four extremities of heaven, excite violent tempests in our soul, banish peace and serenity from our heart; so, on the other hand, the clearness of our understanding for the comprehension of eternal truths, the alacrity of the will for the practice of good works, the subtlety of the memory for calling up ideas altogether divine, lastly, the impassibility of the heart, if we may so speak, acquired by a perpetual mortification of our irregular appetites, like to the four rivers of Paradise, fertilise the spiritual garden of our soul by the abundance of their waters, and establish there that kingdom of peace and felicity, the possession of which renders us a thousand times happier than earth's mightiest potentates. Yes, I repeat, it will be easily demonstrated that the four qualities of glorified bodies are, by a special privilege, appropriated and com-

[1] Philip. iv. 7. [2] Jerem. xlix. 26.

municated, even in this life, to those souls who apply themselves to solid virtue.

Their understanding, illumined by the heavenly light with which it is so frequently favoured, distinguishes the true from the false, it accurately discerns good from evil. For such souls the Gospel is a brilliant sun whose light reveals to them the truth and sanctity of the maxims it contains. The beatitudes which others regard as an insupportable burden, they esteem as alone worthy their ambition. Enlightened by faith, they find glory in contempt, true riches in poverty, solid consolation in adversity; while worldlings, incapable of understanding such sentiments, shrink from everything that savours of privation and suffering. Reputation, bodily comforts, sensual pleasures, appear to those souls as such utter vanity and hollowness that they can scarcely suppress their astonishment at beholding Christians esteem, love, and desire such worthless baubles.

From this clearness of the understanding emanates an admirable promptitude of the will for all that is good, a holy eagerness for the speedy and unreserved accomplishment of the will of God. Like those angels who with reins girt surround the throne of the Divinity, ready to execute all His commands, fervent souls find the burden light which seems insupportable to others, and the yoke sweet which others can scarcely bear. With courageous hand they gather the thorns of injury, they eagerly exhaust the chalice of contempt, they amass and treasure up as diamonds the calumnies which are hurled against them. They elicit and reiterate acts of the theological and moral virtues with so much ease and fervour that their life appears to be an uninterrupted succession, a precious chain, whose continuous links

seem to attach earth to heaven. They mortify their body and fulfil their ordinary exercises of piety and the duties of their office, not with the regret, the reluctance, and the dastardly spirit of a slave, but with alacrity, perseverance, and fervour, consoled by the remembrance that 'God loves the cheerful giver.'[1] Far from being disheartened at what thwarts their inclination, sensuality, and self-love, they generously accept and even sincerely desire it. 'They do not walk, they run,' says St. Bernard, 'in the faithful discharge of a truly religious life; what do I say? they fly! vigils appear short to them, the coarsest food too dainty; painful labour not merely tolerable, but even pleasing.'[2] Privileged souls! who can express the happiness which your fidelity merits for you, what pen depict the charms of the paradise which you possess interiorly? To the promptitude of the will is united a singular subtlety of memory by which the state of the conscience is ascertained, the divine inspirations are embraced and followed, and God shows Himself in the sanctuary of their hearts, hearing and beholding all that passes there. They remember their past faults with the utmost accuracy, for the purpose of bewailing them; they are able to investigate their source with discrimination, to recognise their depraved appetites, to perceive the obstacles to their sanctification, especially those which are most opposed to the amendment of their life, and which most retard their spiritual progress; but they contrive to impart so much sweetness to their efforts that the interior peace with which they are inundated, far from being weakened by them, becomes more perfect, and betrays itself, so to speak, by the heavenly calm of their exterior.

[1] 2 Cor. ix. 7.

[2] St. Bern. Serm. on Ascen.

Spiritual impassibility is another of their privileges. Clothed with 'the breastplate of justice,' defended by 'the shield of faith,' protected by 'the helmet of salvation,' armed with 'the sword of the spirit,'[1] they victoriously repulse the deceitful blandishments of the world, the assaults of the devil, and the seductions of the flesh. Neither the allurements of an illicit desire, nor the inordinate love of the creature, nor the incitements of concupiscence, can find admission into or inflict any wound upon their heart. So fortified are they against the most unexpected events, so superior to all trials, that neither prosperity nor adversity effects the least change in their position: neither can adversity deject nor prosperity elate them. The dominion they possess over all their affections is absolute, and their peace imperturbable. St. John Chrysostom had frequently observed this impassibility of solidly virtuous souls: 'Their virtue,' says he, 'is so firm, that resisting all earthly vicissitudes, soaring above the snares which concupiscence lays for them, they regard with contempt, as from a lofty tower, all that appertains to earth.' 'The virtue of these souls,' adds the same saint, 'modelled on that of the Divine Sun of Justice, goes still further: it renders them so invincible, it makes them to enjoy such perpetual delights, that they are inaccessible to all sublunary vicissitudes. If fire is cast into the sea, it is immediately extinguished; so in like manner all the sufferings that can assail a soul whose conscience is well-regulated soon disappear. Witness the great apostle: a tempest of temptations accumulated on him, and yet Paul rejoiced and superabounded in consolations as though he already experienced the joys of Paradise.'[2]

[1] Eph. vi. 14. [2] Homil. on 2 Cor.

But it is not granted to the pen of a writer to express of what solid peace, what unalloyed felicity, those graces which we have already described are the principle and source. Experience alone can realise it. Oh, a thousand times privileged the souls who possess in this valley of tears the glorious prerogatives with which the bodies of the saints shall be honoured during eternity! They equal the archangels by the brightness of their understanding, the Seraphim by the alacrity of their will, the Cherubim by the subtlety of their memory, and the Thrones by the impassibility, the constancy of their heart. Who will not acknowledge with St. John Chrysostom that, 'retained on earth by the bonds of the body, in spirit they already abide in heaven,'[1] and begin, even in their exile, to enjoy an abundance of the sweetest consolations?

Second proof.—The consolations which they enjoy.

They are of two kinds: interior consolations, which appertain to the soul; and exterior consolations, which communicate themselves even to the body, and captivate all its senses. How great, how excessive are the joys to which the body itself is frequently admitted. Of this the Anthonys, the Ephrems, the Ignatiuses, the Xaviers, and countless other saints are illustrations. So copious was the torrent of heavenly delights with which they were frequently inundated, that they publicly confessed that all the sufferings, the labours, and the anxieties one might have to undergo during several years in the pursuit of virtue are usuriously repaid by one single drop from this ocean of delights.

It is related of Archimedes that so great was his joy at

[1] Homil. on St. Matt.

having discovered the solution of a mathematical problem that, quite beside himself, he immediately quitted the bath in which he was, and ran to his house, repeating incessantly: 'I have found it, I have found it!' Oh, what then shall be our joy when the vision of eternal Truth shall shine upon our heart with the vividness of lightning? Who can explain the tender emotions, the pure, rapturous delight of a soul intimately united to its Beloved by the bond of love, and repeating with the Sulamitess: 'I have found Him whom my soul loveth; I hold Him, and I will not let Him go.'[1] Ah! it is only the Philip Neris, the Teresas, the Stanislauses, the Catherines of Siena, that can fully comprehend and realise this by a happy experience. However, it is only to some souls solidly virtuous, and only at intervals even to them, that God communicates these exterior consolations, because they are rarely free from danger; for this reason we should esteem more the interior consolations of which the soul alone is susceptible, to which we can all aspire, and the acquisition of which should form one of our chief motives for labouring in the work of our sanctification. The source whence these spiritual delights flow is the incomparable glory and rich treasure of which we are put in possession in the service of God. The more abundantly we participate in this glory and treasure, the more our heart is inundated with the affluence of these holy consolations, after the example of the saints who enjoy perfect happiness in heaven, because they possess sovereign glory and exhaustless treasures. Now, according to the divine oracles, the virtuous soul becomes, even in this life, the mother and sister of Jesus Christ, His Beloved and His Spouse.[2] Can we image to our-

[1] Cant. iii. 4.

[2] 'He who does the will of my Father is my brother, my sister, and my mother' (Matt. xii. 50).

selves anything more glorious than so close an alliance, so near a relationship with Jesus Christ?

It has 'the kingdom of heaven,'[1] 'the riches and salvation of God Himself,'[2] for its treasure and inheritance, so that it can say with Solomon: 'all goods came to me' with sanctity, and I have acquired 'innumerable riches through its hands.'[3]

Not only does the soul possess the inappreciable treasure of the friendship of God, but by its strict union with Jesus Christ it contracts a kind of affinity, a mysterious relationship, and a right to a community of goods with the adorable Trinity. Is it surprising, then, that in the possession of their felicity they 'rejoice with a joy unspeakable?' On earth persons are esteemed happy in proportion as they are exalted in dignity and endowed with great wealth; but is it not incontestable that the most enviable position here below bears not the remotest comparison with that of a virtuous soul? There is no one, therefore, who can experience such true consolation and live in such perfect happiness as he who is holy.

Let not this surprise us: self-will and self-love, these two sources of all our troubles and disquietudes are dried up and exhausted, these two enemies of all peace and tranquillity are vanquished in his heart. Yes, experience teaches us that this twofold disorder, of self-love and self-will, is the fatal cause of our interior strifes. In reality, whence proceed those interior storms and tempests of such frequent recurrence, if not from this: that something has been done contrary to our wishes, or something omitted of the accomplishment of which we are desirous? if not some event that has occurred injurious to our honour or painful to our sensuality? some-

[1] Matt. iii. 2. [2] Isaias xxxiii. 6. [3] Wisd. vii. 11.

thing that mars our plans, thwarts our desires, denies our gratifications, frustrates and ruins our efforts? This it is that excites us, afflicts us, and transports us out of ourselves. Thence arises the noxious vapour which originates all our disquietudes and sadness.

On the contrary, a soul devoted to virtue despoils itself of its own will, no longer to follow any will but that of God. It voluntarily renounces the esteem of men and the gratification of the senses; its only wish is to desire nothing; its only ambition to possess an absolute empire over self. As nothing happens without the permission of God, and as the holy soul wishes nothing but what God wishes, so nothing can occur contrary to its desires. It thirsts for contempt, loves its own affliction; therefore contempt cannot disturb nor adversity deject it. It desires nothing, or at least very little; it desires and receives without eagerness; so that, come what may, its peace of heart is never compromised. It consequently enjoys a pure and unalterable interior joy incomprehensible to those who have not experienced it.

Can virtuous souls be otherwise than happy? 'They have placed their felicity in the imperishable Being,'[1] their trust in Him who is immortal, and their confidence in the Infallible: they therefore necessarily enjoy true delights, they are established in solid happiness, and, like the inhabitants of heaven, raised above all human vicissitudes, they live in constant serenity. If there is any happiness on earth it is the inheritance of a soul which labours zealously for its sanctification. And yet, who would believe it? The greater number of men hear these truths without being moved by them,

[1] St. August. on Ps. lxxxiv.

without experiencing any pious emotion; they meditate upon them without being inflamed with a love of virtue; they deem it too difficult to 'crop off the twigs of the cedar to take away the marrow,'[1] 'to go up into the palm-tree to take hold of the fruit thereof,'[2] 'to refuse the vile flesh-pots of Egypt, in order to feed on the celestial manna. O heavens! we believe that 'a soul' zealous for its sanctification is as 'a perpetual banquet,'[3] and yet, like the prodigal child, we prefer to live in the society of unclean animals, to feed on their disgusting food rather than aspire to the delicious nutriment granted to virtue. Lord, 'enlighten my darkness,'[4] inspire me with an utter abhorrence of earthly things, and an ardent desire for those of heaven.

Third proof.—God's special Providence over them for their defence, government, and preservation.

The soul that labours at its perfection is also an object of the special attention, care, and protection, of divine Providence. This, we may say, is the chief recompense with which God completes, even in this life, the glory and felicity of the true disciples of virtue. Clasped in the arms of, and to the heart of, their God as a child on the bosom of a tender and watchful mother; placed as a feeble ward under the protection of a faithful guardian; received as an interesting passenger on board the ship of a skilful and charitable pilot, they live tranquilly, repose securely, and enter the port in safety. For it is certain that the divine Providence watches with an especial affection over the welfare of those who constantly and seriously endeavour to acquire perfection. I shall quote one proof out of the thousand which might be cited of this truth.

[1] Ezech. xvii. 4. [2] Cant. vii. 8. [3] Prov. xv. 15. [4] Ps. xvii. 29.

What is of less price than a sparrow? 'Two' of these birds 'are sold for a farthing.' And yet Jesus Christ assures us 'not one of them falls to the ground' without the permission of His heavenly Father. What is more insignificant than a hair? it is trodden under foot when it falls from the head; and nevertheless, says the Gospel, 'all our hairs are numbered.'[1] What is of less value than 'a lily and the grass of the field which is to-day, and to-morrow is cast into the oven?'[2] and yet, 'God doth so clothe them, that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one' of those weak plants. Finally, what are more worthless than ravens? 'they neither sow, nor do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet God feedeth them.'[3] But if the heavenly Father provides food with so much solicitude for these birds, 'how much more,'[4] oh, faithful souls (and it is Jesus Christ Himself who draws this conclusion), shall He not be your guide and protector, shall He not preserve you whom 'He has loved with an everlasting love,'[5] whom He holds captive in 'the bands of His tenderness for human nature,'[6] you 'whom He bears engraven on His hands,'[7] of whom He has entire possession; since the 'souls of the just are in the hands of God?'[8]

Yes, Lord, 'Thy Providence governs'[9] all things, 'Thou disposest of us with a kind of reverence, for Thy power is at hand when Thou wilt;'[10] 'Thou hast care of all men,'[11] but particularly of those who on their part tend faithfully to their perfection. 'Thou occupiest Thyself about each of us as if he were alone, and about

[1] Matt. x. 29, 30. [2] Ibid. vi. 29. [3] Luke xxii. 24. [4] Matt. vi. 30.
[5] Jerem. xxxi. 3. [6] Osee xi. 14. [7] Isaias xlix. 6. [8] Wisd. iii. 1.
[9] Ibid. xiv. 3. [10] Ibid. xii. 18. [11] Ibid. xii. 13.

all at once, with the same solicitude as about each individually,'[1] but Thou hast a special care of those who are striving after perfection. 'Thou carriest them in Thy bosom,'[2] 'Thou guardest them as the apple of Thine eye,'[3] Thou guidest them through dangers. In their behalf Thou turnest aside the stumbling-blocks, breakest the arrows of temptation, repulsest the assaults of hell, and so wisely directest the different events, that 'all things,' even their faults, 'co-operate to their good, because they love Thee.' It would be impossible to express of what consolation, what a plenitude of peace, what a treasure of hope, the intimate faith, but above all the practical experience of these paternal cares are the source and principle. For 'what can man fear,' says St. Augustine, 'when he reposes on the bosom of God?'[4] What is wanting to him who is replenished with the Divinity, what remains for that heart to desire, which is inebriated with the full possession of its Beloved? 'It is the Lord who guideth me,' joyfully exclaims the soul, 'it is the Lord who guideth me, I shall want for nothing.'[5] 'He hath given His angels charge over me to bear me up in their hands: I am certain, therefore, of not dashing my foot against a stone,'[6] 'I shall walk unscathed on the asp and the basilisk, I shall trample under foot the lion and the dragon'[7] without danger, 'and if I drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt me.'[8] 'The Lord is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear? The Lord is the protector of my life: of whom shall I be afraid?'[9] No, 'never will He permit anything to happen to me but what is useful, though I

[1] Conf. St. Aug. b. iii. ch. 11. [2] Numb. xi. 12. [3] Deut. xxxii. 6.
[4] Con. b. ii. ch. 10. [5] Ps. xxii. 1. [6] Ps. xc. 12.
[7] Ibid. xc. 12. [8] Mark xvi. 18. [9] Ps. xxvi. 1.

do not always know'[1] how to discern it. 'There is no father like God,' says Tertullian; 'He knows what is best for me, because He is infinitely wise, and He can bestow it on me, because He is all-powerful. He will then undoubtedly grant it to me, since He loves me without bounds.' 'I will throw myself into His arms, and He will not withdraw them to let me fall.'[2] 'I will cast all my care and uneasiness upon Him, for He hath care of me;'[3] 'for my Beloved is mine and I am His.'[4] Oh, happy lot! He is mine. . . . I am His. . . . He is mine to find His delights in me. . . . I am His to centre in Him all my love. He is mine to be my salvation. . . . I am His to be the object of His solicitude. My wishes, therefore, have been accomplished; what more shall I ask? I am satiated with blessings, what more can I desire? What remains for me but to 'rest' fearlessly on His bosom, 'to sleep' there 'in peace'[5] in the most perfect security. Such are the sentiments of a soul which tends unswervingly to sanctity. Oh, enviable happiness! Oh, unheard-of favour of divine Providence! Oh, exhaustless source of joy. No, not the most thrilling eloquence, not the most copious and imaginative writers, could adequately extol the felicity found in the cares of this adorable Providence, and the merit of those heroic hearts who know how to despise adversity. Though, tempted like Job, they see 'their house thrown down by a violent wind, their flocks and those who had charge of them struck by lightning and reduced to ashes,' though all that belongs to them 'be invaded, plundered, and carried away by rapacious strangers,'[6] though their fortune be swallowed by the

[1] St. Aug. Solil. ch. 15. [2] Ibid. Conf. b. ii. ch. 10. [3] 1 Pet. v. 7.
[4] Cant. ii. 16. [5] Ps. iv. 9. [6] Job i. 19, 16.

waves, though their possessions be inundated and ravaged 'by the breaking up of the foundations of the the great deep and the opening of the flood-gates of heaven,'[1] still they remain calm in the midst of all these trials. Invariable as the mariner's compass, they constantly turn towards the pole of the divine will: amid these violent storms, they, faithful satellites of the Sun of Justice, follow Him with an irresistible attraction, even when He is enveloped in clouds. 'The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away,' shall be ever on their lips; 'as it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done; blessed be the name of the Lord;'[2] for they are well aware that all that happens to them is by the permission of Him 'who commands the winds and the waves,'[3] 'who holdeth the keys of the abyss,'[4] who 'bindeth up the waters in His clouds.'[5] They know that it is 'from the throne' of His merciful Providence 'proceed lightnings and thunders,'[6] 'and the flame of devouring fire.'[7]

If the chalice of sickness is presented to them they do not refuse to drink it, because they firmly believe that it has been prepared for them by the divine Physician Himself. Should all hell conspire against them they are not appalled, because they are confident that 'God who is faithful will not suffer them to be tempted above that which they are able.'[8] Dejection, sadness, and inconstancy are unknown to them; their life flows on in peaceful serenity even in the midst of the clouds in which it is sometimes enshrouded. The words of the Psalmist: 'the Lord watcheth over me:'[9] the pious sighs of St. Ignatius: 'Lord, govern me according to the dictates of

[1] Gen. vii. 11.
[2] Job i. 21.
[3] Luke viii. 25.
[4] Apoc. xii. 1.
[5] Job xxvi. 8.
[6] Apoc. iv. 6.
[7] Isaias xxix. 6.
[8] 1 Cor. x. 13.
[9] Ps. xxxix. 18.

Thy wisdom, for I know that Thou lovest me,' are their most habitual expressions, the shield with which they ward off sorrow and uneasiness.

Oh, enviable lot of the virtuous soul! it renounces creatures to devote and consecrate itself unreservedly unto God; it possesses nothing which it has not presented to its Creator, it abandons itself wholly and confidently to Him, and it mixes no rapine in the holocaust. Dead to self-will, it lives only for the divine will. Confiding in God, it seeks and desires only His grace; abhorring, shunning sin, it fears and hates itself. Leaning on its Beloved, it dares all, hopes all; and in the 'name of its God it passes over the wall'[1] which they oppose to it. Inflamed with a heavenly ardour, this soul flies in the paths of virtue, it lives in the tranquil atmosphere where weariness cannot approach it; resting on the bosom of divine providence, clasped in the embraces of its heavenly Father, it enjoys an inexpressible happiness, which is the assured pledge of the eternal peace which awaits it. As it gives itself wholly to God, so also God communicates Himself unreservedly to it, so that even in this life it is happy in every respect, both on account of the graces with which it is enriched, the consolations with which it is inundated, and the special care with which divine providence defends, governs, and preserves it.

What are now our thoughts? What sentiments have these reflections awakened in our soul? How culpable shall we be if, recognising the value of this perfect felicity, we experience no desire to merit it!

Fools that we are! we run to broken cisterns, sigh for spoiled grapes, pine for the flesh-pots of Egypt, and close

[1] Ps. xvii. 32.

our hearts to that torrent of delights with which truly devout souls are inundated even in this valley of tears. We reck not those inestimable gifts which correspond to the qualities of glorified bodies: we despise those consolations one single drop of which is infinitely more delicious than all the pleasures of earth; we fly from the paternal bosom of divine providence, and thus preferring dross to gold, we become our own worst enemies.

Yes, my God! we forfeit all these graces because we do not belong wholly to Thee. Thou withdrawest Thy heavenly gifts from us, because we refuse Thee our earthly goods. Thou withholdest Thy bounty from us because we are too avaricious with Thee. But we are filled with confusion for having acted so unworthily towards Thee up to this; we repent of having given our perfection the lowest place in our esteem. O Jesus! who desirest that we be perfect, 'as Thy heavenly Father is perfect,'[1] grant us grace at length generously to break the chains which bind us to earth, render us the slaves of our vices, and estrange us from the paths of virtue. Grant that, admitted to the liberty of the children of God, we may, by a truly happy life, enjoy, even in this world, the anticipated reward promised to sanctity.

Article II.

Those alone die in peace who devote themselves to their perfection.

So peaceful is the death of the just man that it is styled sleep by Holy Scripture: 'If thou sleep thou shalt not fear; thou shalt rest, and thy sleep shall be sweet.'[2]

There are three qualities of the death of the just ex-

[1] Matt. v. 48. [2] Prov. iii. 24.

pressed in these words of Proverbs: it is calm, 'you shall rest;' pleasing, 'your sleep shall be sweet;' replete with holy confidence, 'you shall not fear.' It is on this divine testimony that St. Bernard founds three degrees of happiness, which he attaches to a holy death: it 'is happy on account of the rest it procures; happier still on account of the sweet joys with which it is accompanied; infinitely happy on account of the confidence'[1] which it imparts at this awful moment; for the death of the man who is faithful puts an end to his past labours, it is accompanied with consolations and exempt from anxiety. Behold the three motives for which the virtuous soul quits this world with perfect tranquillity, but it is those who endeavour to acquire solid virtue who are entitled to hope for this peace.

1. *The just man dies in peace, because death puts a term to his past labours.*

The death of the just man, that is, of him who applies himself fervently to virtue, is happy on account of the repose it procures after the labours of this life. 'You shall rest.' It is to the just man, arrived at this supreme moment, that this promise of the Holy Ghost is addressed: 'From henceforth they may rest from their labours.'[2] From henceforth all the sufferings of body and soul shall cease for them, and consequently all physical and mental suffering, which sometimes unite and become so intolerable as to force the most courageous and patient to cry out with St. Paul: 'Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'[3] But it is from this very point of view, remarks St. Bernard, that 'the death of the saints is precious, because it is the end of

[1] Letter 105. [2] Apoc. xiv. 13. [3] Rom. vii. 24.

the' painful 'labours'[1] they had to endure both in body and soul during life.

In their last moments the voice of the Spouse shall sweetly murmur in their ear: 'Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come. Winter is now past, the rain is over and gone,'[2] that winter of life during which sufferings, afflictions, sickness, trials, and annoyances of every description overwhelmed thee. 'The rains are over,' those rains which incessantly poured adversity, persecution, anguish, weariness, uneasiness, and vexation upon thee as a torrent. They are gone, and with them all evils are about to disappear; with them shall vanish all those dark clouds which obscured thy conscience, those scruples which have filled thy soul with so much dread, which have inflicted on it so many wounds. 'Arise, my beloved, from thy bed of sufferings,' quit this 'valley of tears,'[3] this 'land that is dark and covered with the mist of death,'[4] come 'my dove from the clifts of the rock, from the hollow places of the wall,'[5] where thou wert exposed to so many storms; make 'haste my beautiful one' to withdraw from 'the pit of misery and the mire of dregs,'[6] from that mud so detrimental to the white robe of thy innocence. 'Come, oh my spouse! from the dens of the lions, from the mountains of the leopards;'[7] free thyself from those snares, those occasions and dangers of sinning which abound in the world, which are strewn upon thy path, and in the midst of which thou couldst not walk without trembling: 'Come, come, thou shalt be crowned,'[8] for 'the crown of justice is laid up for thee which the Lord, the just Judge, will render

[1] Letter 105. [2] Cant. ii. 10, 11. [3] Ibid. lxxxiii. 7.
[4] Job x. 21. [5] Cant. ii. 14 and 10. [6] Ps. xxxix. 3
[7] Cant. iv. 8. [8] Ibid.

to thee in that day.'[1] 'The time for pruning[2]' 'the flower of the field and the lily of the valley[3]' with the scythe of death, and of giving them a place in the kingdom of heaven 'is come.' Oh, sweet words! oh, thrice-happy invitation!

But is it surprising that the just man enjoys at death a peace and tranquillity exempt from all anxiety? That he joyfully hastens at the call of his Heavenly Father, as little chickens are wont to collect around their mother? That, in the excess of his gladness, he repeats with the Royal Prophet: 'I rejoice at the things that were said to me, we shall go into the house of the Lord?'[4] And that he says to those around him: 'Behold with your eyes how I have laboured a little and have found much rest.'[5] For his whole life appears to him then to have been of but a moment's duration. 'All is past,' cries he, 'no trace remains of the injuries, the contempt, and the calumnies of which I have been the object; the macerations of the flesh, the mortification of the senses, the fasts and abstinences have now reached their term. The honours, pleasures, and comforts of life, had I attached my heart to them, would now likewise have vanished: nothing would remain to me of them but the stings and remorse of conscience. At present, on the contrary, my soul overflows with joy, because I have devoted my whole being to the acquisition of solid virtue, because I have refrained from the evil which I might have committed, and have performed the good which I was bound to practise.

Oh, what a source of peace shall it then be, 'not to have loved the world, nor the things of the world;'[6] 'not

[1] 2 Tim. iv. 8. [2] Cant. ii. 12. [3] Ibid. ii. 1.
[4] Ps. cxxi. 1. [5] Eccli. li. 35. [6] John ii. 15.

to have sought his own glory;'[1] 'not to have taken the first place, but to have sat in the last;'[2] 'to have chastised his body and reduced it to subjection;'[3] 'to have renounced self and daily carried his cross.'[4] What a source of tranquillity shall it not be, to have dissembled injuries, borne affronts in silence, supported misfortune with patience, laboured much for the neighbour, and suffered still more for God. Oh, blessed contempt, austerities, and afflictions! Oh, noble patience in adversity! Oh, beloved fatigues! you are the keys which have opened heaven for me, the sublime ladder by which I have ascended to the pinnacle of glory. Thanks, a thousand thanks to my God for having granted me the grace 'to have kept the commandments from my youth,'[5] 'paid my vows which my lips have uttered,'[6] 'done penance in sackcloth and ashes for my sins,'[7] 'and by my good works made my vocation and election sure.'[8]

Oh, how wise I have been thus to have prevented by a holy behaviour, the fears which a tepid life would have caused me at this moment, to have escaped the uneasiness which would now torment me, had I not obeyed the divine inspirations! Ah! I might have consented to that temptation; I was even on the point of yielding to it, but I resisted it. Alas! had I slept in my tepidity what should have become of me? But I have surmounted it, and I have worked out my salvation. I have endured cold and heat in labouring in the Lord's vineyard, therefore it is that I confidently expect the reward promised by the divine Father of the family.

Such is the language, such are the sentiments at death of him who has during life applied himself to virtue.

[1] John vii. 18. [2] Luke xiv. 7. [3] 1 Cor. ix. 27. [4] Luke ix. 23.
[5] Matt. xix. 20. [6] Ps. lxv. 14. [7] Matt. xi. 21. [8] 2 Pet. i. 10.

Then it is that the recollection of the labours he has courageously sustained, of the dangers he has had the wisdom to avoid, of the sufferings he has borne uncomplainingly, is fraught for him with sweetness.

My God, how much more prudently shall we judge of perfection at the close of life than at its commencement! When we reflect on sanctity at the moment of desiring to enter its paths, we are terrified, discouraged at the idea of spending twenty or thirty years in strict retirement, constant corporal mortification: of wrestling during forty or fifty years 'against flesh and blood, against the rulers of the world of darkness, and against the spirits of wickedness.'[1]

But when we consider it at the moment that those efforts are about to cease, at the hour of death, how beautiful, how desirable shall it seem to us! For then the soul that has 'crucified its flesh, its vices, and concupiscences,'[2] exclaims with the dying Saviour: 'All is consummated.'[3] 'If I cast a glance behind me,' he joyfully exclaims, 'I have had fearful combats to sustain, great obstacles to surmount, generous efforts to make. But immortal thanks to my God! all is consummated: the season of misery is ended, never to return: labours are passed away for ever: all my trials are at an end. There shall be no more sickness, no more adversities, no more crosses, no more penances, no more desires to combat, no more evil passions to subject, no more assaults to repulse: 'all is consummated.'

'I have had to struggle against numberless and terrible temptations; but behold me in safety at the port: I have experienced a dreary and perpetual exile, and I have reached my happy country: I have traversed a

[1] Ephes. vi. 12. [2] Galat. v. 24. [3] John xix. 30.

long and difficult route, and have arrived at the term of my journey: I have reached, 'through a barren, desert-land,'[1] to the fountain of celestial delights. I am about to enter into the possession of goods for which my faith rose superior to all difficulties; I shall soon enjoy what I have hoped for anxiously. Loved eternally, I shall love in my turn the Sovereign Good without measure, whom until now I have not loved sufficiently. The termination of the miseries of this world shall be for me the commencement of the joys of paradise. Oh, happy remembrance of the past! thou art a delicious balm whose sweetness heals all wounds and diffuses an enchanting tranquillity in the soul of the dying.

2. *The death of the just man is peaceful, owing to the sweet joys by which it is accompanied.*

The death of the just man is happy, not merely because it puts an end to his past labours—'You shall rest'—but also it is happier still on account of the sweetness of the consolations with which it is accompanied: 'Your sleep shall be sweet;' the testimony of a good conscience, detachment from all created affections, and the sight of Jesus Christ nailed to the cross, shall be the three motives of this consolation.

The testimony of a good conscience.

We may apply to the just man the eulogium which St. Paul bestowed on the patriarch Enoch: 'Before his translation he pleased God.'[2] For the conscience of the just man testifies to him that 'he has lived in this world in simplicity of heart, and not in carnal wisdom, but in the grace of God.'[3] He hears in his soul's depths

[1] Ps. lxii. 2. [2] Heb. xi. 5. [3] 2 Cor. i. 12.

a voice which is the echo of his past life, and which gives him the moral assurance that he deserves the friendship of his God, that he has made his confessions well, that he is a child of God and an heir of heaven, that he has the right to hope firmly in the divine mercy, for final perseverance and life eternal.

He is not ignorant that even he who is holiest, so long as life remains, is liable to forfeit grace; but he also knows that such a misfortune is very rare, and that it must be reckoned amongst the number of the greatest improbabilities. He is aware that 'God is faithful,'[1] that He will never permit him to die badly who has lived well; nor that he will arrive at Babylon who has taken the road to the heavenly Jerusalem. He knows that 'if our heart do not reprehend us we may have confidence towards God,'[2] He will be propitious to us and will not allow us to be tempted beyond our strength.

This testimony imparts such consolation to the soul of the just man, it inspires him with such a firm hope of his salvation, that when the devil endeavours to disturb him with temptations to diffidence, he laughs at his efforts, and says to him, as Jacob did to Laban, 'Search, and if thou find any of thy things with me, take them away;'[3] 'search, scrutinise, examine as closely as thou wilt; I possess nothing that belongs to thee; thou shalt find nothing in me which proceeds from thy pride and thy ambition, thy frauds and thy malice.' He even dares, with St. Martin, to assume an authoritative tone, and defy his enemy, saying to him: 'Why remainest thou here? thou shalt discover nothing reprehensible in me.'

The dying just man 'is intrepid as the lion, he fears nothing.'[4] Though 'the devil come to him, having great

[1] 1 Cor. x. 13. [2] John iii. 21. [3] Gen. xxxi. 32. [4] Prov. xxviii. 1.

wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time,'[1] he awaits him undauntedly 'and terrible as an army ranged in battle,'[2] impregnable as 'a fortified city,'[3] as 'a brazen wall;' he victoriously repulses the assaults of hell; 'strengthened in the Lord and in the might of His power, clothed in the armour of God, he resists the artifices of the devil, and with' a breath 'extinguishes all the fiery darts of the most wicked one.'[4]

So many years spent by him in the service of his adorable Master; so many days, each moment of which he has turned to account; so many merits, which he has accumulated as a rich treasure, precede him to eternity and inspire him with the most well-founded hope. On the one side Jesus Christ has promised that the 'kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit: that the merciful shall obtain mercy: that the clean of heart shall see God: that the peacemakers shall be called the children of God: that an abundant recompense awaits in heaven those who suffer persecution for justice' sake:'[5] that the humble shall be exalted: that those who weep shall be comforted: that the hungry shall be satiated: that those who have left all to follow Him shall receive the hundred-fold: these promises our Saviour has confirmed by the infallible authority of His Word; on the other side, the conscience of the just man bears him testimony that he has fulfilled the conditions to which the infinitely just Judge has attached 'the never-fading crown of glory;'[6] he has no reason, therefore, to apprehend its being refused to him. He knows that God Himself has written in the Book of Life all the virtues he has practised, and to which infinite rewards have

[1] Apoc. xii. 12. [2] Cant. vi. 9. [3] Ps. xxx. 2.
[4] Ephes. vi. 11 and fol. [5] Matt. v. 3 and fol. [6] 1 Pet. v. 4.

been promised. Resting on the fidelity of God, he confidently awaits his reward. He has provided himself in time with the oil of charity, and has no fear of being excluded like 'the foolish virgins,'[1] from the nuptials of the Lamb; and such is his confidence, that neither temptations, nor scruples, nor apprehensions of the divine justice are able to shake, disturb, or diminish it.

Who, then, can express the ineffable consolation which the just man derives from the consciousness that he is that 'blessed rich man that could have transgressed' the commandments 'and hath not transgressed them, and could do evil things and hath not done them;'[2] that he is the good and faithful servant 'whom the Lord shall place over all His goods;'[3] that he is even more than a servant, he is the friend of Jesus Christ, the child of God and heir of heaven. Thus it is that his conscience shall console him at the approach of death, at the gates of eternity, at the point of appearing before the dread tribunal of God, that is to say, at the moment when the alliance of kings, the most exalted titles, the possession of a throne, are but as vain smoke, a phantom in our eyes, the moment at which the grace, favour, and friendship of God, are alone of any value in our esteem. The death of the just man is, therefore, truly precious and desirable, on account of the consolations afforded by the testimony of his conscience.

Detachment from all created affections.

Behold another source of consolation at death. What renders death, and even the very remembrance of it, sad and bitter to worldlings, is the abandonment of the beloved objects to which they are so strongly attached.

[1] Matt. xxv. 12. [2] Eccli. xxxi. 8. [3] Matt. xxiv. 47.

The irregular love of earthly things, and the passions which dominate over the heart, become by habit a second nature, which identifies itself with the lives of carnal men; they become a necessity, the privation of which casts them into the most fearful disquietude at the last moment, and wrings from them tears and groans of despair. For to descend from the pinnacle of honour, of which they have been so passionately enamoured, to quit those palaces adorned with so much magnificence, to leave those riches amassed with so much care, to relinquish those pleasures which they have pursued with so much ardour, this it is that inflicts a mortal wound on the lovers of the world, proud and voluptuous men!

On the contrary, 'with what confidence he dies who is not held captive by attachment to any creature.'[1] For what is there that can afflict or disturb him? The relinquishment of riches, which are about to pass over to strangers? Long since he has renounced them, if not in effect at least in affection. His dignities, which others are about to possess? Far from having ambitioned, he has always despised them. The privation of sensual pleasure? By a severe self-imposed law he has always interdicted himself from them. He is not grieved at being separated from his business, because he has only lent himself to it, nor at quitting his friends, because, with him, friendship was always subservient to religion; nor at seeing his body reduced to ashes, because he has always treated it as an enemy; nor at abandoning the world, because he has always looked upon himself as a traveller 'who has not here a lasting dwelling.'[2]

He voluntarily and intrepidly presents himself to death; he gives his body as food to that insatiable

[1] St. Jerome Letter. [2] Heb. xiii. 14.

monster who devours all men, in order that the prison of the flesh, which detained it captive, being destroyed, his liberated soul may ascend to heaven; he joyfully beholds the approach of this pitiless spoiler and mocks at his rage, because, having long since renounced all things, nothing remains of which he can be deprived; and having kept the accounts of his conscience in perfect order, he is ready to follow this inexorable executor of the divine justice, by whom he is to be cited to the awful tribunal. The sufferings attendant on his last moments are a subject for joy to him, regarding them, as he does, as an anticipated liquidation of all he should have to suffer in purgatory, and as a trivial compensation for the long and dreadful torments he should have to undergo in those expiatory flames.

It is said that the illustrious Suarez joyfully cried out, amid the excruciating sufferings which preceded his dissolution: 'I should never have thought that it was so sweet to die.' How many other holy personages have manifested the same sentiments, and, in confronting death, tasting celestial joys, have intoned themselves or asked others to sing canticles of thanksgiving to the God who was trying them? The reason of this was that their souls, free from all affection for the world, were as stars elevated above the impure atmosphere of earth, precious stones extricated by skilful labour from their native rust, agile eagles which had not allowed their wings to be smeared by the perfidious glue of the senses. They were, consequently, inundated with delights at the very moment that the idolatrous slaves of the world and of self 'die in bitterness of soul.'[1] Weary of earth, longing for heaven, the masters of their passions, they no longer

[1] Job xxi. 25.

desired anything save their one only Beloved. Their last efforts were burning acts of love, fervent aspirations towards heaven, ardent desires to see God: they consumed themselves as a lamp in the house of the Lord; they burned as incense on the holy altar, and the fire of charity made of their hearts an agreeable offering. Behold what consolation detachment from creatures imparts at the hour of death! But what completes the happiness of the just soul in this awful passage is the sight of Jesus Christ nailed to the cross, whose image, placed before his eyes, seems to be the only good that remains to him of all that he possessed.

The sight of Jesus Christ crucified.

Oh! how full of sweetness shall the contemplation of the crucifix be for those who shall have conformed their lives to the adorable Model whom it recalls! Oh, what consolation shall the dying soul find in looking at this Divine Exemplar when he has lived in such sort as to be able to say of himself: 'I am fastened to the cross with Jesus Christ;'[1] for the living sight of this holy image soothes his bodily sufferings and augments the confidence of his soul.

Those who understand the great mysteries concealed in the cross, know by experience how calculated the sight of it is to obliterate the remembrance of all pain and suffering. If the wood which Moses plunged into the waters of Mara rendered them sweet and agreeable, what consolation will not the remembrance of a God dying for us impart to our hearts? 'If a brazen serpent, exposed as a sign of salvation, had the efficacy to cure the Israelites of their diseases, what consolation shall

[1] Gal. ii. 9.

we not find,' says St. Augustine, 'in casting our eyes on Him of whom the brazen serpent was but a figure?' The cross presented to our view transforms even pains and sickness into delights by its celestial sweetness. What is astonishing in this? while a pious soul contemplates his 'Beloved chosen amongst a thousand,'[1] torn with scourges, crowned with thorns, pierced with nails, His Heart opened with a spear, he is ashamed to be himself a delicate member under a Head delivered up to such excruciating torments. While he compares the evils he endures with the sufferings of his Saviour, and at the same time, contrasts the crimes of which he has been guilty with the innocence of this spotless Lamb, he is ashamed of the signs of sensibility which suffering wrings from his weakness. 'O my Jesus!' he exclaims, amid his sighs, 'Thou hast drained the chalice of afflictions at one draught, and I refuse the little Thou presentest to me? "Thy suffering is great as the sea,"[2] mine is scarcely a drop, and I presume to refuse it! Far from me be such a disgraceful opposition to Thee! for, "the servant is neither greater" nor better than "the Master."[3] Cut, then, and burn here below, provided Thou sparest me in eternity.'

When the just soul hears Jesus Christ manifest His great love for man by repeating that He thirsts for still greater sufferings, when he sees Him ready, as He revealed to St. Bridget, to die and suffer again for each one of us the same torments that He has already endured, then he conceives a holy indignation against himself, and emulous of his Saviour, he experiences a thirst like to His, he asks, he incessantly invokes new suffering, new infirmities. This energy of heart even

[1] Cant. v. 10. [2] Lament. ii. 13. [3] John xiii. 16.

contributes materially to alleviate his physical sufferings. Thus it is that the sight of Jesus dying is at the supreme moment a source of consolation and strength to the just man. Nor does this salutary sight inspire him with a less confidence. What can he fear, armed with this shield? What may he not hope for with so precious a pledge? 'Behold thy God, thy Saviour,' may they say to him, presenting to him the crucifix as his last hour draws nigh. 'Behold thy God, thy Saviour; act confidently, because the Lord is thy strength and thy salvation.'[1] Thou shalt find in Him an invincible armour against temptation, a remedy for all the evils of thy soul. If the fire of concupiscence be enkindled within thee, 'He is the source of living waters springing up to life everlasting,'[2] which extinguishes all profane ardours; if the infernal ravisher pursue thee, His wounds 'are the clifts in the rock, the hollow places in the mysterious wall,'[3] in which, like the timid dove, thou canst take refuge. 'If the fountains of the great deep threaten to engulf thee,' His Heart is 'the city of refuge,'[4] where thou shalt find safety and repose. The nails which fasten Him are the anchor of thy firm hope: His life is the plank of safety on which thou shalt enter unscathed the eternal port. Are not these certain pledges of our salvation, powerful motives for perfect confidence? But our Saviour's insatiable love has not yet been satisfied. To remove every pretext for diffidence in His limitless love and to give us a certainty of His tenderness, He bows His head in dying to bestow on us the kiss of peace, He stretches out His arms to receive us to His Heart, He opens His side to grant us an asylum therein, He sheds His blood to purify us in

[1] Isaias xii. 2. [2] John iv. 14. [3] Cant. ii. 14. [4] Josue xxi. 13.

this adorable bath. He constitutes Himself our advocate with His Father, He solicits our pardon with deep groans: 'Father, forgive them;'[1] 'remember my poverty, the wormwood and gall;'[2] 'have mercy on them according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies.'[3] Yes; unless we be as hard as adamant, such an excess of tenderness cannot fail to inspire us with an unbounded confidence. What! Could the blood of Abel be more powerful than the voice of Jesus Christ? Who would presume to utter this blasphemy? If the voice of the blood of the innocent Abel, ascending from earth to the throne of God, could draw down vengeance upon it, how much more efficacious shall be the voice of the blood of the only Son ascending from the cross to His heavenly Father to solicit our pardon? If men, how wicked soever they may be, 'do not give a scorpion' when they are asked for 'an egg, nor a stone' to him who wishes for 'bread;' with how much greater reason should we not believe that the 'Eternal Father' will not refuse to give the 'right spirit,'[4] that is, His grace, at the request of His beloved Son, at the moment He is expiring amid the most excruciating torments. For if this loving Saviour 'is heard for the reverence that is due to Him,'[5] when He prays for His enemies, what will He not obtain when He addresses his supplications in behalf of a faithful and virtuous soul? Ah! to be diffident of our salvation when we consider Jesus Christ dying for us is to wound the Almighty in the apple of the eye, since in such a guarantee everything promises eternal life. To distrust so certain a security is to renounce all hope.

[1] Luke xxxii. 34. [2] Lament. iii. 19. [3] Ps. l. 3.
[4] Luke xi. 11. [5] Heb. v. 7.

Can we now doubt that the sight of our Saviour fastened to the cross soothes the sufferings of the body and increases the confidence of the soul? and that the death of the just man is precious on account of the rest it procures after labour, and above all, on account of the sweetness and consolation with which it is accompanied —a consolation founded on the testimony of a good conscience, detachment from created things, and the consideration of Jesus Christ expiring on the cross?

3. *The just man dies in peace because he is not uneasy concerning his future.*

Finally, the death of the just man is most precious, because he is not harassed by that uneasiness concerning the future, that harrowing fear of the last ends, which cast the tepid soul into such overwhelming anguish in his last moments: 'You shall not fear.' At the end of life three things especially disturb a soul that has neglected its perfection: death, judgment, and purgatory: death, because it separates from all; judgment, on account of the severity of the Judge; and purgatory, owing to the intensity of its punishments. These thoughts cause but little solicitude at the approach of the last hour to those who have devoted themselves to virtue.

1. The just man while in robust health 'died daily'[1] to himself, that is to say, he daily detached his heart from earthly affections, refused himself all gratifications, and denied himself sensual pleasures; he renounced honours, and day by day accustomed his soul to separate itself from the body. He became in some manner familiarised with death by frequent reflections on this last terrible moment;

[1] 1 Cor. xv 31.

so that now, far from fearing, he ardently desires its arrival; and as he has never been the slave of an inordinate attachment to any creature, disengaged from all earthly bonds, he willingly parts with them to go to that home towards which all his aspirations have incessantly tended for long years.

He knows, as Tertullian expresses it, 'that we should not fear that which delivers us from all evil,' from sufferings of body, anxieties of soul, and above all, from sin, the greatest of misfortunes. And because death places us in the happy impotence of suffering and of sinning, not alone does the just man not fear, he even longs for its arrival.

He believes that the present life is an exile from heaven, a separation from the Sovereign Good, a captivity of the soul, which deprives it of the perfect liberty of the children of God. He acknowledges that the solicitudes which this life imposes torment him, that the affairs in which it absorbs and the fatigues with which it overwhelms us are a great obstacle to the love of God within us; that the violence of our passions, the darkness of our understanding, and the corruption of our will, almost necessitate our offending a God who is infinitely good. He knows even to a certainty that he cannot remain long on earth without sullying his conscience with some venial sin. On the other hand, he has learned from St. Ambrose, that his departure from this world 'is less' the end of his 'existence than of his malice, less the term of his years than of his faults, and less an entombing of the man than the end of sin.' He has learned from St. Gregory Nazianzen, 'that the death of the saints is not a death, that it is the departure of the soul to God, the accomplishment of its desires, the deliverance from its bonds and from the burden beneath which it groaned.'

Finally, he is not ignorant that 'this life on earth is a perpetual warfare, a race in which we must run with all our strength, an arena on which we must strive;' he acknowledges that his whole life is a difficult and dangerous pilgrimage, a continual martyrdom. The nearer he believes himself to the victor's crown, the more anxious he is for the end of this struggle. As he ardently desires to behold God face to face, to possess Him perfectly, and be intimately united to Him, and as He knows at the same time that death is the only way of attaining to this ineffable happiness, he would wish, every moment, for the arrival of the time when he should be freed from his mortality to enter into the happy necessity of loving this infinitely amiable God henceforth without diminution.

The just man, therefore, far from fearing, desires death, because, 'he who is without spot may lift up his face towards heaven, shall remain steadfast in the time of battle, and shall not fear'[1] death.

2. Even the approach of judgment does not appal the just man in his last moments. He remembers, it is true, that 'the justice of God, lofty as mountains, that the judgments of the Lord, deep as an abyss,'[2] will speedily exercise their prerogatives. He is aware that from this tribunal, before which he is about to appear, there is no appeal, that its decrees are irrevocable. He believes that nothing is hidden from the severe Judge who presides thereat. But he likewise believes that this God is faithful, that He has promised that whoever examines himself before judgment shall find mercy'[3] before his Judge, that those who 'judge themselves shall not be judged.'[4]

[1] Job xi. 15. [2] Ps. xxxv. 7. [3] Eccli. xviii. 20. [4] 1 Cor. xi. 31.

His conscience testifying to him that he has scrupulously examined, and afterwards sincerely, lucidly, and fully confessed all his faults to the minister of reconciliation, and that he is in the friendship of God, free from all apprehension, he presents himself confidently before Him whose 'mercies are above all his works.' True it is that the eternal decrees of God concerning the election and reprobation of men are profound and unfathomable mysteries; but it is equally true 'that His mercy is inexhaustible, and that the riches of His bounty are infinite.'[1] Therefore it is that the just man, recalling to mind the numberless and special graces which he has received from God, doubts not, but that the gift of final perseverance will set its seal on all the others, and that at the tribunal of God he will be treated not as a foe, but as a friend, the son and heir of his heavenly Father.

'Oh, Judge of the living and the dead,'[2] does he exclaim, yes, 'I confess my iniquity; I have sinned against Thee, I have done evil in Thy presence;'[3] 'my iniquities are gone over my head,'[4] 'they are multiplied above the hairs of my head;'[5] but nevertheless, my God, 'be Thou mindful of Thy word, which has given me hope:' for Thou hast said to us by Thy prophet: 'Be converted and do penance for all your iniquities, and iniquity shall not be your ruin.'[6] Thou hast promised by Zacharias: 'Turn to me and I will to you:' I have Thy promise to this effect. Now, O Father of mercies! my conscience testifies to me that 'I have turned to Thee;' do 'Thou likewise turn' to me, and 'let not my iniquity be my ruin.'[7] Wouldst Thou permit it to be said of Thee that Thou hadst failed in power or in fidelity to Thy word?

[1] Prayers of Church at Mass. [2] Acts x. 42. [3] Ps. l. 5, 6.
[4] Ps. xxxvii. 5. [5] Ibid. xxxix. 13. [6] Ibid. cxviii. 49. [7] Ezech. xviii. 30.

Thou wilt keep it, Lord, who can doubt it? Thou wilt absolve me at Thy judgment; Thy bounty will admit me to the choir of true penitents. Such are the powerful motives which console and animate the just soul at the portals of eternity. 'If a sinner does penance,' says holy Scripture, 'none of his sins which he hath committed shall be imputed to him, but he shall surely live'[1] a true life. These merciful words are for the just man a safe buckler against the arrows of divine justice. If they do not altogether dissipate, they at least materially diminish his apprehensions.

3. Finally, not even the pains of purgatory, which he may have to endure, inspire him with excessive fear, because he has already considerably mitigated the punishment due to his sins by voluntary corporal mortifications, fervent acts of virtue, or by drawing from the treasury of indulgences which the Church has opened to him an abundant compensation for his debts. Resting on the oracle of Jesus Christ: 'the merciful shall obtain mercy,'[2] with 'the same measure that you mete unto others it shall be measured to you,'[3] he is but little alarmed at the virulence of this fire, because, having incessantly and fervently laboured for the relief of the souls in purgatory, he firmly hopes that in reward for his charity he shall himself escape almost unscathed from those purifying flames: his confidence is founded on the generosity of Him who deigns to regard as done to Himself all the good that is done to those who belong to Him, according to His promise: 'as long as you did it to one of these, you did it to Me.'[4] Thence the just man concludes, that Jesus Christ will not permit that he who has so often delivered Himself from this expiatory

[1] Ezech. xxxiii. 16. [2] Matt. v. 7. [3] Mark iv. 24. [4] Matt. xxv. 40.

prison in the person of those who belong to Him, should be long detained there. If any debt to the divine justice still remain to be liquidated, should he be cast into prison with the unjust steward to suffer there 'till he have paid the last farthing,'[1] his confidence does not forsake him; he hopes to be speedily liberated through the virtue of the Masses offered for him, the prayers of the faithful, the intercession of the saints, and of the holy Mother of God. He places his hope especially in the merits of Jesus Christ, which are not only of infinite value, but also belong to us of right, by the donation made to us of them by our Redeemer. He offers them, therefore, to the Eternal Father, being certain that the divine justice cannot refuse, or the divine mercy reject them, and that by them he can superabundantly repay all that he owes. However, should God ordain to treat him with inexorable severity, and demand a long expiation of his least faults, adoring the divine decrees, he kisses the paternal hand that chastises him, and by conforming his will to that of the omnipotent, is thus enabled to moderate his fear of the punishment he has merited.

Oh! how precious, then, is the death of the just soul, since it is a repose from past labours, and he shall rest; more precious still, owing to the consolations which accompany it, 'it shall be sweet;' most precious, in fine, because he experiences no anxiety concerning the future.

Let us conclude from these motives that those who apply themselves to virtue not only live happy, but also die in peace. Now, is there anything better, more desirable than such a fate? Is there anything, in fine, more capable of determining us to labour for our perfection?

Let us place in one side of a balance all the pleasures

[1] Matt. v. 26.

of the senses, the gratifications of the flesh, the seductions of the world, for love of which we renounce our perfection; and in the other the consolations with which a holy soul is recompensed, not alone during its earthly pilgrimage, but above all at the moment of its departure from this life. Oh, how far the joys granted to virtue exceed the others! how far more ennobling and soothing they are to the heart; and yet, fools that we are, we prefer 'the rivers of Babylon'[1] to this ocean of incomparable delights!

We are all desirous of a happy life, we ardently hope for a holy death. But the only way of attaining this twofold good is a constant attention to our sanctification.

Let us do now what we shall desire to have done when our death-knell tolls, and since we shudder at the thought of dying like the tepid, let us emulate the lives of the fervent, for death is the echo of life. Let us live for God alone, if we wish to die in the Lord; and while we are still in health, let us sacrifice all that could disturb us at death. O God, the arbiter of our eternity! Thou hast assured us that those 'who are undefiled in their ways are blessed,'[2] that 'with him who feareth the Lord it shall go well in the latter end.'[3] I believe on the faith of Thy word that the life and 'death of the saints are precious in Thy sight;'[4] 'may my soul,' therefore, 'die the death of the just, and may my last end be like to theirs.'[5] As I can have no share in their happiness, unless my life resembles theirs, I am firmly resolved to commence from this moment the work of my sanctification by the sacrifice of this object, this par-

[1] Ps. cxxxvi. 1. [2] Ibid. cxviii. 1. [3] Eccli. i. 13.
[4] Ps. cxv. 15. [5] Rom. xxiii. 10.

ticular attachment which, until now, has opposed the greatest obstacles to my progress in virtue. But do Thou, 'without whose aid man possesses nothing good in himself,'[1] grant me the strength necessary to execute this resolution, that I may be of the number of Thy elect who live happy and die in peace.

Article III.

Of the vice opposed to hope which causes us to despair of perfection.

We admit that solid virtue raises us to the summit of happiness both in life and at death. But the road which conducts thereto seems to us too narrow and difficult, too rugged and steep: we are afraid to enter it.

We resemble the spies sent by Moses into the country which God had promised to the Israelites, and who, having returned, declared that the land which they had traversed produced an abundant supply of delicious fruits, that it abounded in rich harvests, that it was quite true 'that milk and honey flowed there,' but that 'it devoured its inhabitants,' that 'it was' covered 'with large and fortified cities; that 'they had seen monstrous men of the race of giants;' whence they drew this hopeless conclusion: 'Never could we subjugate this country.' These pusillanimous spies image to us the cowardice of those souls who acknowledge that virtue secures a happy life and a peaceful death to its votaries; but who persuade themselves that the paths of justice are infested with monsters, or rather encompassed with insurmountable obstacles, which hinder their reaching this blessed goal.

[1] Prose of Holy Ghost.

Three kinds of excuses are usually alleged in justification of our sloth and diffidence, when we cease to labour for our perfection; these pretexts are: our disposition, our state of life, and the arduousness of the work. We shall endeavour to make known the falsity of these motives, and to prove that if the path of virtue is strewn with thorns, these thorns do not inflict intolerable wounds; that if it is narrow, it is not so intricate and painful that we cannot pass through it and clear away the obstacles it presents; that the monsters with which our imagination has invested it are but delusive phantoms and the inventions of self-love.

1. *Our Disposition.*

There is nothing more common than this vain excuse: happy they who, like Solomon, have received a 'soul disposed to good,'[1] or, like Sadoc, 'an excellent disposition'[2] to virtue. For it is easy for them to 'take the wings of the eagle,' to run in the way of perfection, 'and never faint.'[3] But for me, 'whose imaginations and thoughts are prone to evil from my youth;'[4] me 'a, captive under the law of sin that is in my members;'[5] me, 'who do the evil which I will not, unhappy man that I am;'[6] oh! how can I ascend above the earth and fix my thoughts on heaven? Yes, says another; all sorts of soil are not suitable to every description of vegetation: all kinds of flowers do not receive the same amount of cultivation: every man is not fitted to make a saint. There are some whose nature, character, and inclinations are great impediments to virtue. How is it possible that he whose blood effervesces, and who seems

[1] Wisd. viii. 18. [2] 1 Parlip. xii. 28. [3] Isaias xl. 31.
[4] Gen. viii. 21. [5] Jerem. ix. 14. [6] Rom. vii. 19.

to possess the impetuosity of the lion, shall be able to transform himself into a lamb? that he whose nerves quiver as though mercury flowed in his veins, should retire from the world 'like the owl of the wilderness or the sparrow alone on the housetop?'[1] that he over whom melancholy predominates, who seems to have received sadness as an inheritance, should support adversity with a calm and serene brow? or that he who is of a phlegmatic temperament or of a dull, indolent disposition, should burn with charity, and nimble 'as the roe leaping over the mountains and skipping over the hills,'[2] elevate himself to the summit of sanctity? who could expect such a miracle from so sluggish a disposition? 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its colours?'[3] Can we with more facility rid ourselves of a vice which is identified with our nature, and assume the habit of the opposite virtue?

I do not admit all these sophisms; but I maintain that every man, whatever may be his disposition, fiery or phlegmatic, sanguine or bilious, provided he is faithful to grace, shall find in his temperament itself not an obstacle, but an actual help to sanctity. The Holy Ghost seems to insinuate this truth by the vision shown to Ezechiel, of the four animals, one of which had the appearance of a man, another that of a lion, the third that of an eagle, and the fourth that of an ox. These animals, according to some interpreters, are symbolic of the different humours which contribute to diversify the temperaments of men. Each of them 'went straight forward, whither the impulse of the spirit was to go;'[4] that is, they followed so faithfully the impulse they received from the spirit, that they neither turned to the

[1] Ps. ci. 18. [2] Cant. ii. 9. [3] Jerem. xiii. 23. [4] Ezech. i. 12.

right nor to the left, teaching us by this complete dependence that our character and our dispositions, whatever they may be, are no impediment to the acquisition of virtue. For had we a temperament choleric as that of the lion, impulsive as that of the eagle, sluggish as that of the ox, volatile as that of man, 'who never continueth in the same state,'[1] still, if we follow the direction of grace with docility, we shall indubitably attain perfection without ever deviating from the paths of justice. Let us give some examples of this. Who ever possessed a more ferocious disposition than Paul? was more enamoured of profane pleasures than Magdalen? more avaricious of riches than Matthew and Zaccheus? And, nevertheless, these great sinners, resisting their depraved and rebellious propensities, have attained to an eminent holiness. Paul 'breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord;' Magdalen was a public 'sinner in her city;' Matthew 'was sitting at the receipt of customs,' receiving money with avaricious cupidity; Zaccheus was 'one of the princes of the publicans,' of these men who enrich themselves by illicit usury. But in an instant Paul becomes 'a vessel of election,' 'many sins are forgiven' Magdalen, Matthew is chosen for an 'apostle,' and Zaccheus is numbered amongst the true 'children of Abraham.' Who then can justly allege the obstacles which temperament or disposition oppose to our sanctification? For though these extraordinary conversions be miracles of grace, still such prodigies are not of such rare occurrence that we may not hope to see them proportionately renewed in us. Let us read the history of the Church, let us glance over the lives of the saints,

[1] Job xiv. 2.

and we shall find in every page the verification of the prophecy of Isaias: 'The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the lion and the sheep, the calf and the bear;' that is, that the most heroic virtues have in all ages been associated with all temperaments, and that the sanguine and bilious, the melancholy and the phlegmatic, have practised them alike.

What striking instances of this are afforded us by St. Augustine, St. Gualbert, St. William, and countless others whom the Church now honours among the friends of God, despite the perversity of the inclinations they had to combat. 'Let us' say, then, with St. Ambrose, 'that the saints were not of a different nature from us, but that they were more faithful than we.' Amongst the multitude of the Israelites whom Moses led into the desert, assuredly there were many whose dispositions and temperament opposed as many, nay more obstacles to virtue than ours do, who were as prone to levity, anger, sadness, sloth, as we are, yet the Lord addressing Himself to Moses, says: 'Speak to the whole assembly of the children of Israel, and say to them: Be holy, because I the Lord your God am holy.'[1]

Now, it is not possible that God, who is infinitely just, should command an impossibility, and yet on this entire people, without one exception, does He who knows our dust impose the obligation of sanctity and perfection, and that notwithstanding the diversity of character which exists amongst them. Perfection, therefore, being possible to the most depraved amongst the Israelites, how can it be impracticable for us? consequently the bilious man, with his propensity to anger,

[1] Levit. xix. 2.

the sanguine with his ardour for pleasures, and the phlegmatic and the melancholy with their sloth and sadness, may become saints. It is then a vain and idle pretext to seek excuses in our temperament. As the natural asperity, bitterness, and other bad qualities of the wild olive are counteracted by having a free branch engrafted on it, cannot divine grace effect a like change in us?

What! shall the power of Jesus Christ possess less efficacy on us than the free branch grafted on a wild tree? The branch can change the nature of the fruit of the tree on the stem of which it is grafted, and Jesus Christ will not be able to change ours? Who will presume to place such narrow limits to His grace? rather let us have confidence; provided we allow it to act without restraining its operations, we shall soon experience its influence diffusing itself into the faculties of our soul, to enrich with its beauty and its value and transform it into a soul altogether new. As the natural bitterness and other bad qualities of the wild olive are counteracted by the free branch, so divine grace, in communicating itself to us, softens the asperity of our dispositions and corrects the evil tendencies of our inclinations. Hence it is that St. Basil concludes, that no one, 'however vicious he may be, should despair of himself, knowing that if cultivation can change the nature of plants,' self-vigilance may also correct the bad habits of the soul.

What do I say? not alone is our temperament, whatever it may be, no impediment to the acquisition of virtue, but it may even, according to the use we make of it, prove a powerful help in the work of our perfection. Our predominant passion itself, which is so closely

allied to the humour which preponderates in our constitution, if we know how to direct it properly, shall become the step by which we may ascend to sublime sanctity.

Of this we may judge by the example of the saints already quoted. Magdalen sought not to curb the tendency to love, which so strikingly characterised her; but she denied herself all profane affection to consecrate every fibre of her heart to God. St. Paul after his conversion preserved his intrepid, ardent and zealous disposition; he only applied it differently, directing the zeal with which he had persecuted the Church to the promulgation of the Gospel; St. Matthew substituted a love of souls for his thirst for gain; St. Ignatius, instead of that avidity for military glory which consumed him, was no longer sensible of any glory save that of his divine Master. Thus it is that the saints have happily contrived to convert dispositions apparently the most difficult to subject to grace, into instruments of spiritual advancement.

'The devil,' says St. Leo, 'studies our habits, scrutinises our cares, examines our affections, and seeks the opportunity of injuring us in those things with which he sees us most preoccupied.' Why should we not employ the same weapons for our spiritual advancement which are so successful when wielded by our adversary for our destruction? This is a pious artifice, the efficacy of which Aristotle had recognised when he wrote that 'we should examine those things towards which we find ourselves most strongly attached, and afterwards direct this inclination towards a laudable object.'

It is even in some manner more desirable to possess a choleric than a mild disposition, to which nothing seems to cost anything. For there are some virtues which have,

so to speak, so great an affinity to the temperament of some persons, that one may easily deceive himself by this semblance of sanctity, and attribute to piety what is purely natural. Thus we erroneously style meekness and mansuetude, what is sometimes only an excess of a phlegmatic humour; prudence and gravity, an apathetic melancholy; charity to the neighbour, worldly politeness; nevertheless, such works are neither supernatural nor meritorious, and we shall find at the hour of death that what we regarded as precious stones were but worthless glass. The more difficult it is to subdue our character, the more certain we are of escaping so fatal a delusion; so that the ardour and violence of our dispositions, far from being a hindrance to the acquisition of virtue, shall, on the contrary, if properly directed, be a powerful means of attaining perfection. No one, therefore, can reasonably despair of becoming holy on account of the obstacles opposed thereto by his inclinations.

2. *Our state of life.*

There are some persons in the world who persuade themselves that perfection is not obligatory on all states and ages. They regard it as an exotic fruit which cannot attain maturity save in the deserts of anchorites or the monasteries of religious. They imagine that the possession of virtue is a treasure which it is bootless to seek in the stormy ocean of the world. They pretend that it is impossible for them to walk constantly in the paths of perfection, owing to the hurry of business, the anxieties of life, and family cares. In fine, they allege that the young man, on account of the delicacy of his age, and the old man owing to the decay of his strength, are incapable of ascending sanctity's rugged heights. Whence they conclude that perfection is not obligatory on all classes.

Reassured by this fancied impotency, they neglect their sanctification. The young defer it to old age; the old regret having neglected it in their youth; the poor envy the rich the facilities they enjoy for sanctifying themselves; the rich, on the contrary, lament the many obstacles which impede their heavenward course. The prince alleges the court, the judge the palace, the soldier war, the learned man his studies, the artisan his work, the farmer his tillage: all have excuses to adduce which have long prevented their becoming saints and working miracles. All deceive their conscience and waste their time in futile desires. Frequently they exclaim with a sigh: 'Oh, that I were in another place, another state of life! Oh, did I but occupy another office, did I but possess a more opulent fortune! how much more perfectly I would live! Oh, that those years, those opportunities, those graces, would but return! Oh, how much more faithfully would I correspond with them! Thus it is that with equal fallacy and imprudence we throw the blame of our faults and tepidity on our occupation, our age, our place of abode, or the persons with whom we live. Nevertheless, it is not our condition, but the apathy of our will, which is the sole cause of this evil. Every page of the annals of the saints refutes these mendacious pretexts. For example: Henry on the throne, Radegonde amid the honours of a court, Eustace in a camp, Ives at the bar, Crepin in his workshop, Isadore following his plough, Wandelin tending his flocks, have obtained a brilliant crown of sanctity. Stanislaus in boyhood, Louis of Gonzaga in youth, Ignatius in manhood, Augustine in old age, became saints. Patricius in travelling, Thomas of Aquinas in studying, Herman in illness, Blandina in service, have attained to high perfection. These are proofs

that neither age, nor condition, nor any of the other circumstances of life are a real obstacle to our sanctification. Who was ever more overwhelmed with business than Moses, Josue, and Samuel? Who was more engaged in family cares than Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Who had to suffer more injuries than Job, David, and Jeremias? And yet all these illustrious personages, now associated with the blessed, shine and shall shine 'as stars for all eternity.'[1] These great men, despite the imperfection of the Old Law, have been able to attain the most exalted virtue; why shall not we be capable of doing so who live under the Law of Grace, in which the divine aids are incomparably more abundant and efficacious?

But even without referring to those examples, reason itself can demonstrate what is possible on this point. Because true piety consists in the faithful accomplishment of the obligations which God imposes on us, and in the perfection of our daily actions; it consists in doing or omitting what the divine law commands or prohibits. Now, we have already proved in the second part of this work, Chapter I., that it is possible for each one of us, whatever may be our temperament, state, or condition, to perform all our ordinary actions faithfully: hence it follows that in all places and circumstances every one can become perfect.

Were sanctity to be found only in sublime contemplation, were it necessary to seek it in unbroken solitude, beneath the ensanguined thorns of mortification, amid the remote islands of a different hemisphere, then that courtier, that magistrate, that young man, that decrepit old man, might plausibly plead for an exemption. But what great difficulty is there in performing well those

[1] Dan. xii. 3.

actions which we are obliged to do, and accomplishing for the love of God what so many others do with a view to temporal interest? To be as solicitous in the service of God as others are in that of the world? In fine, not to offend, at least with full deliberation, not to displease and irritate Him who is infinitely amiable? Where is the Christian so pusillanimous as to deem this impracticable? It is, therefore, beyond dispute that our condition, our state of life, whatever it may be, is not an impediment to perfection, since all conditions have given eminent saints to the Church, thus proving irrefragably that sanctity is compatible with every situation in which divine providence may place us.

'But,' you say, 'how can one inhale the pure air of sanctity amid the turmoil of the world, the anxiety of family cares, and the burden of business?' I reply that, even under these circumstances, it is not so difficult as is supposed to attain perfection. A penitential life is the shortest road to it. Now, who have so many opportunities of suffering as men of the world, who, day and night, at home and abroad, are perpetually meeting crosses? They are obliged to bear patiently either the ill-temper of a wife, the obstinate disobedience of their children, the intractability of their servants; or to endure in heroic silence the loss of their property, the insolence of debtors, the insincerity of friends. But to suffer those and a thousand similar trials with perfect submission, sanctified by faith, is assuredly to advance with rapid strides in the paths of justice. Who is more frequently obliged to renounce his own will, submit his judgment, practise obedience and repress his desires, than a man of the world? If he do it for the love of God it will suffice to make him a great saint.

Should an artisan ennoble his labour by a pure and upright intention, his humble workshop would become a noble arena, wherein to exercise himself in virtue. But if we observe a different mode of action, we live wretched amid all the austerities of penance, and die without having acquired the merit of it. One might have been a martyr of God, and he is the martyr of satan; from all these miseries, labours and trials he reaps thorns instead of roses, and far from ensuring for himself a recompense from God, he only accumulates his debts to the divine justice. You say you cannot effect much good, at least bear patiently the misfortunes which befall you. If you cannot perform great things, at least do not neglect little ones, for fidelity in small things is the surest road to high sanctity; if you cannot relieve your neighbour by alms, edify him by good example. If you cannot renounce your riches, at least divest yourself of all affection for them: if you occupy an exalted position, recall to mind your baseness and nothingness, and humble yourself beneath the feet of all. Thus it is that you will acquire solid piety. An additional proof this, that there is no state or condition which, far from impeding, may not aid us to attain perfection.

3. *The difficulty of the labour.*

To destroy the third pretext which our sloth alleges to dispense itself from virtue, and demonstrate its fallacy and illusion, it suffices to cast a glance at what takes place in the world. Where is the state, condition, or kind of life here below which does not superabound in obstacles a thousand times more serious and important than those which the practice of piety presents? What courtier, warrior, or merchant has not more weariness to

endure, more sufferings to bear, more anxieties and fears to surmount than the peaceful anchorite? The magistrate, the lawyer, the artisan, each one complains of the difficulties of his state and envies the repose of the religious. But above all, what monarch, what potentate does not experience the acuteness of the thorns which lurk beneath his crown?

And yet it is rare to see these men of the world abandon the career on which they have entered, renounce their crown, the profession of arms, or their merchandise, or even relinquish the hope of success. The difficulties of the labours inseparable from their condition do not disgust them with these occupations and temporal goods; why then should they divert you from the practice of virtue? Since men of the world pursue perseveringly the route they have entered on, why should you renounce your hold of the plough and look back? But, besides, it would be necessary to quit this world if we are so pusillanimous as to cede to the least opposition, since labour and suffering are as the two pivots on which our life is doomed to turn incessantly. How vain and false, therefore, is the excuse founded on the trials and difficulties of virtue!

Let us be more just in our judgments, and we shall perceive that the path of virtue is not so painful as our self-love, deluded by the artifices of the devil, takes pleasure in representing it to us. To be holy, it suffices that we shun sin with the same horror as we would avoid a dreadful dragon; that we reject temptation with the same promptitude as we would shake off a spark which had fallen on our hand: that we bring as much attention to prayer as to play; to assisting at the sacred mysteries as to study. No more diligence is required

of us in the examination of our conscience than in the examination of our accounts; no more attention to the purity of our heart than to the neatness of our apparel; nor more solicitude in guarding our senses than in preserving our riches. Finally, nothing more is exacted of us than that we do not take less care of our soul than of our health; that we do not entertain more esteem for our body than for our mind, not less zeal to profit our soul than to procure our livelihood. Shall we deem this commandment too irksome, too difficult? Shall the same thing appear impossible when demanded by God, and easy when exacted by the world?

Oh, heavens! is it then so difficult to recall occasionally the remembrance of Him who never for one moment forgets us? Is it so painful to love Him with our whole heart who is infinitely good in Himself, owing to the plenitude of His perfections, and infinitely good to us on account of the numberless benefits with which He has loaded and continues to load us? Is it an impossibility to despoil ourselves of self in order to clothe ourselves with Jesus Christ? to renounce human glory in order to obtain grace? to despise dross in order to gain heaven? to detach ourselves from all created affection in order to possess the Creator? Where is the man of sense who would not blush to act otherwise? Were it necessary, in order to attain perfection, to accumulate riches, to obtain new dignities, to possess worldly pleasures, to avoid all adversity, then our apology would be well-founded. But since, on the contrary, one of the conditions of sanctity is to renounce riches, despise dignities, fly pleasures, seek afflictions; since we know that, clothed with Jesus Christ, we, as well as St. Paul, can do all things in Him who strengthens us, is it not

evident that the pretext of the difficulty of the labour is void and illusory?

The yoke of the world is far more severe than that of Jesus Christ: the burden of the flesh far heavier than that of the cross, since virtue does not impose so many privations on its votaries as vanity does on its slaves. Study the man who is desirous of realising a fortune: what injuries he will have to dissemble, what remorse to stifle, what insults to endure. There are no flatteries so fulsome, no services so humiliating, no labours so painful, to which he will not be obliged to stoop, notwithstanding his pride.

What anxiety has not the father of a family to undergo in order to provide for his children? What annoyances does not a client put up with rather than forfeit the favour of his patron? What fatigues does not a debtor endure to amass wherewith to satisfy his creditors? But when one has at length obtained an honourable position and a respectable competency, has he not still to suffer cold and heat, fatigues and solicitudes, in order to avoid the loss of such perishable goods, to guard against the freaks of fortune, to prevent contempt from succeeding to honours, indigence to affluence? So that we can say, even of the favourites of fortune, what St. John says of the damned: 'Neither have they rest day nor night.'[1]

And the wonder is, that notwithstanding all this, they devote all their energies to the pursuit of the course on which they have entered, undeterred in their enterprise by any of the difficulties that present themselves Though a shower of arrows rain upon them, though javelins be darted against them, they follow unflinchingly wherever the desire of a perishable object leads them.

[1] Apoc. xiv. 11.

And as for us, oh, the shame! the mere shadow of suffering scares and turns us away from perfection.

'Would to God! my brethren,' says St. Bernard, 'would to God that we were as desirous of grace as seculars are eager for temporal goods! Would to God that we tended to virtue with the same persistency that they seek for honours! Then we should be truly happy. But, oh, the grief! filled with confusion we see them desire evil more ardently than we do that which is useful.'

Consequently, St. Laurence Justinian admonishes us that we shall be one day unsparingly accused by 'those worldlings who now, to attain their ends, deliberately expose their body to dangers of all sorts, and their soul to perdition; they will arise,' says this saint, 'these men will arise in judgment against us, and they will have a right to condemn us who have abandoned the paths of virtue for so frivolous a cause. They will adduce against us their daily toils, mental sufferings, frustrated hopes, the continual labours endured to procure a subsistence, some trifling gain: while we, disheartened at the mere appearance of labour, and reckless of heavenly things, have slothfully crossed our arms. To avoid so great a confusion,' adds the same Pontiff, 'let us make haste to awaken our heart from this lethargy, to direct the thoughts of our soul to the Lord our God, let us humbly implore His clemency that He deign to stimulate the sloth which predominates over us, that he dissipate the deceitful pretexts of temperament,' state of life, and the labour attending perfection, so that, instead of despairing of it, 'we may advance daily from virtue to virtue' till it be granted us to see 'the God of gods in Sion,'[1] and eternally enjoy the happiness of this ineffable vision.

[1] Ps. lxxxiii. 8.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LOVE OF GOD DEMANDS AND MERITS THAT WE PRACTISE SOLID VIRTUE.

'Love is strong as death.'[1] Death, this inexorable executor of divine justice, severs with a single stroke all the links which bind us to earth; when the hour has arrived it relentlessly rends all that prevents our arriving at the term of the great voyage of eternity. So in like manner the love of God breaks the bonds in which the flesh, a new Dalila, has enchained us, and stronger than Samson, it removes and carries off all the obstacles which are to be met with in the practice of virtue. So that we know no more powerful incentive for labouring to attain perfection than the love of a God who merits and demands that we practise solid virtue. God wishes that we should become holy, He merits that we should become so. This twofold truth, well understood and sustained by a lively and active charity, exercises an irresistible attraction over our hearts, and elevates them to the summit of perfection. It is the prerogative of charity, therefore, to decide a victory which faith, hope, and fear, have not yet been able fully to achieve.

Article I.

God wishes that we should become holy.

First proof.—The testimony of Scripture: 'God wills that we be holy,'[2] holy in our entire life. He desires that all men be perfect in Jesus Christ. The testimonies of the two first Princes of the Church, St.

[1] Cant. viii. 6. [2] 1 Thess. iv. 3.

Peter and St. Paul, are so explicit on this point that it would be an excess of temerity to deny the designs of God for our sanctification.

Not alone this, but the only Son of the Eternal Father, 'the brightness of His glory and the figure of His substance,'[1] the Master, Legislator, and Judge of the whole human race, clothed in our flesh, has, in virtue of 'the supreme power which has been given to Him in heaven and on earth,'[2] intimated to His disciples, and to us through their ministry, this great commandment: 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect;'[3] 'for it is written: you shall be holy for I am holy.'[4] Could He speak to us more clearly or give us more express and positive orders? He explains to us the motive through which we should tend to perfection: 'you shall be holy because I am holy.' He marks the degree of sanctity to which we must attain: 'be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,' at least in so far as human weakness is capable of it.

Be not astonished at such a commandment; for says the apostle, it is for this end that 'God hath delivered us and called us by His holy calling;'[5] it is for this 'that He chose us in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in His sight in charity.'[6] Yes; it is for this end that God, who stands in need of no one and who is amply sufficient for Himself, 'has called us' to the Catholic faith in preference to so many infidels, heretics, and worldlings: it is for this that He has exalted us to the priesthood, and to the religious state, 'in order that we may be holy:' it is for this that He has chosen us in preference to so many

[1] Heb. i. 3. [2] Matt. xxviii. 18. [3] Matt. v. 48.
[4] 1 Pet. i. 16. [5] 1 Tim. i. 9. [6] Ephes. i. 4.

others whom He has left in their nothingness and their sin: it is for this, in fine, that He has rescued us from so many dangers and misfortunes, 'that we should be unspotted' in His sight, and holy by charity, whose works are made manifest by the practice of solid virtue. Behold the divine will in our regard, behold the end of our vocation and election, an end towards which we are bound to devote ourselves with our whole strength. In a word, the will of God is that man sanctify himself: 'God wills our sanctification.' This truth is clearly demonstrated by the testimonies we have just given.

The work of our sanctification is not only a counsel but a precept, which is obligatory on seculars as well as on religious. 'Both the one and the other,' says St. Thomas, 'should equally strive to practise the virtues proper to their state; the only difference between them being that religious are bound to aspire to a higher perfection than seculars. The practice of virtue, according to the condition of each one, is as essential to a disciple of Jesus Christ as light is to the sun: all men are bound to it, not even excepting those who must spend their lives immersed in worldly concerns. This we have already demonstrated by texts of Scripture; and St. Paul, far from endeavouring to prove it, supposes it as an evident truth. Many of his letters written to the primitive Christians, all of whom were living in the world, bear these significant titles: 'To the Saints of the Church of God at Corinth;' 'to the Saints at Rome,'[2] 'to the Saints at Ephesus,'[3] 'to the Saints at Philippi.'[4] The great Doctor of the nations laid it down as an axiom, therefore, that the quality of saint and of Christian is inseparable, and consequently that all who have the

[1] Cor. i. 2. [2] Rom. i. 7. [3] Ephes. i. 1. [4] Philip. i. 1.

happiness to belong to the law of grace should constantly practise solid virtue.

This apostle likewise tells us that all Christians, without exception: 'are the temple of God where the Holy Spirit dwelleth;' he adds and declares at the same time, that 'this temple should be holy.'[1] Conformably to this doctrine we should all then, seculars included, perform those good works proper to our state. And those living temples, founded and begun in baptism, we should elevate day after day, by incessantly increasing in justice, and advance the building of them by the grace of Him 'in whom all the building, being framed together, groweth up into a holy temple in the Lord: into an habitation of God in the Spirit.'[2] 'All Christians,' continues the same apostle, 'even seculars, are members of the body of the Church of which Jesus Christ is the Head.'[3] But if, according to St. Bernard, it is a shame to be a delicate member under a Head crowned with thorns, how much more ignominious is it to be a degenerate, vicious, indifferent member under a holy Head. The doctrine of St. Thomas, therefore, which we have already explained, is quite true; and we must thence conclude that, not only religious but also seculars, are bound to tend to the perfection suitable to their state, since both the one and the other are members of the Church, the temple of God, 'the children of the saints.'[4] Yes; it is incontestable that these words of Jesus Christ, 'be holy,' are for all men not merely a counsel, but a positive precept.

For, those whose condition retains them amid the embarrassments of the world, must likewise lead an innocent life, full of good works. On them also the Gospel im-

[1] 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.
[2] Ephes. ii. 21, 22.
[3] 1 Cor. xii. 20.
[4] Eccli. xlvi. 15.

poses the obligation to repress their anger, combat their pride, subdue their flesh, love their enemies, assist the poor, in a word, to fulfil their duties conscientiously. The apostle desires that they live in the world 'soberly, and justly, and godly;'[1] God exacts, therefore, that they as well as religious become holy, though we must admit at the same time that the latter must endeavour to attain to a higher sanctity, owing to the excellence of their state and the copiousness of the graces they receive.

'Hear, O ye heavens, let the earth give ear to the words of'[2] the mouth of God, and receive with respect the command He is about to issue. Behold what this Creator Almighty, 'and greatly to be feared,' 'under whom they stoop that bear up the world,'[4] says: 'Be holy,'[5] 'Be ye holy, because I am the Lord your God,'[6] be 'perfect and without spot.'[7] Who will presume to dispute such a precept? It is intimated to us by Him who 'has no equal amongst legislators,'[8] 'all whose ordinances are equity'[9] itself, and who never exacts impossibilities, but who assists us in the accomplishment of His will. Yes; He who 'commands us to be holy,' is 'the Most High, the most high Creator,'[10] 'whose hands have made us and fashioned us wholly, who has clothed us with skin and flesh and put us together with bones and sinews;'[11] who consequently has a right, since we are 'the work of His hands,'[12] to enjoin on us whatever He pleases. He who wills that we be perfect is the 'infinitely wise King,'[13] 'from whose eyes nothing is hid,'[14] 'who remembereth that we are dust,'[15] who beholds all human infirmities, who is not ignorant either of our

[1] Tit. ii. 12. [2] Deut. xxxii. 1. [3] Eccli. i. 8. [4] Job ix. 13.
[5] Levit. xix. 2. [6] Ibid. xx. 7. [7] Deut. xviii. 13. [8] Job xxxvi. 10.
[9] Ps. cxviii. 172. [10] Eccli. i. 8. [11] Job x. 8, 11. [12] Ps. xviii. 1.
[13] 2 Kings xxiii. 8. [14] Eccli. xxxix. 24. [15] Ps. cii. 14.

disposition, state of life, or the difficulties we have to overcome, and who, notwithstanding all this, requires that we exert ourselves to the utmost to become saints. Finally, He who commands us to be irreprehensible is 'the God of dominion who sitteth upon His throne,'[1] the 'Mighty in strength,'[2] 'in whose hand is the soul of every living thing,'[3] who consequently can punish us at any moment should we neglect to obey Him. And yet there are men who delude themselves, and who, confiding in frivolous pretexts, refuse to submit to such just orders: who represent solid virtue to themselves as superior to their strength and impracticable to human weakness: who cast the blame of the transgression of the precept on its difficulty: and who dare to aver that God commands more than their frailty is equal to.

And yet, God says to Abraham: 'Take thy only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him in holocaust upon one of the mountains which I will show thee.' Immediately this holy Patriarch, 'rising up in the night, went to the place which God had shown him, and he put forth his hand and took the sword to sacrifice his son,'[4] although he foresaw that the same stroke which imparted death to Isaac deprived him of all hope of posterity.

Scarcely has Abimelech said to his companions: 'What you see me do, do it promptly,' when instantly 'they hasten to cut down branches and follow their leader'[5] to set fire to the enemy's citadel, though the undertaking was almost certain death. These and many similar acts of obedience which we might adduce were accomplished without demur at the first order given, and notwithstanding their difficulty: and we Christians, we refuse

[1] Eccli. i. 8. [2] Job ix. 4. [3] Ibid. xii. 10.
[4] Gen. xxii. 2, 10. [5] Judges ix. 48.

to obey our Sovereign Master despite His reiterated entreaties and even the facility of His commands.

God commands us to immolate to Him, after the example of Abraham, such or such an attachment which opposes the greatest obstacle to His grace, and we answer His ordinance by a refusal. Jesus Christ earnestly repeats to us these words of Abimelech: 'What you see me do, do it promptly; for I have given you the example that you do as I have done;' and we close our ear to His invitation. The Holy Ghost ardently desires our perfection, He incites, He urges us by His continual inspirations to labour fervently for its attainment, and yet, up to this, during so long a period His solicitations have been fruitless. Shall we then be so imprudent as to despise only the commandments of God, whose sole end is our happiness? Shall we, on the contrary, pay so much care and attention to the execution of the orders of a man, which are generally so difficult of execution, and which have no other object than the interests of him who imposes his will upon us? A monarch issues a command, and forthwith from all parts of his empire the troops assemble to march against the enemy, to attack fortresses, to mount the breach, to overthrow ramparts. A mighty potentate makes a proclamation, and fleets are equipped, sails spread, the sea is furrowed in all directions, men despise tempests and shipwreck, and hasten to land on the enemy's coasts.

Represent to these men the resistance they shall have to encounter in the execution of their sovereign's orders, endeavour to depict to them the countless dangers which await them; point out to them the uncertainty of success, the emptiness of the glory, the worthlessness of the guerdon they ambition, the peril to which they expose

their lives; all your remonstrances will be useless; they will reply to you by this unanswerable reasoning: 'The king commands it, the emperor desires it, the prince ordains it;' such are the talismanic words which enable them to conquer, overcome, and shatter all obstacles.

On His side God asks us—God—what a name! God, I say, asks us to renounce such a creature, to abandon such a desire, to commence the practice of holiness by a decisive determination, a real victory over ourselves, and yet, oh, the shame! we continue tepid and slothful, we close our ear, we procrastinate day after day, and at length, without having completed anything, we often relinquish with indifference and disgust the duty which we had begun reluctantly. Answer, you holy angels. At which are you more astounded, the insolence of man, thus oblivious of what he owes his Maker, or the goodness of God, who so patiently bears this insult? Ah! let us be ashamed to see 'worldlings more eager for what may cause their ruin than we are for life,'[1] more assiduous in serving the world for a vile metal than we are to serve God or obtain His grace.

The authority of the Almighty is not less binding in His commands than in His words. If we believe His words, why disobey His precepts? And since He exacts, as we have demonstrated by texts of Scripture, that we become holy, why do we not strive to acquire sanctity? The reason is that we do not love Him; because, if we ardently loved this sovereignly amiable Being, we should speedily overcome all obstacles in order to tend perseveringly to solid virtue.

[1] Imit. b. iii. ch. 3.

Second proof.—The succours God grants us: The numberless helps which God bestows on us are another convincing proof that this Sovereign Master desires that we apply ourselves to sanctity; for since His infinite love supplies us so liberally with the means to acquire perfection, certainly we must thence conclude that this is the end which divine providence proposes to itself. Even as he who desires to attain an end must adopt the means which conduce thereto, so in like manner He who by His power bestows on us abundant helps for attaining sanctity, clearly testifies that He proposes to Himself, and that He requires that we become holy. We have already shown in the second part of this treatise how numerous and efficacious are the means which God gives us. But besides, is it not evident that the lights and good inspirations, the frequent participation in the sacraments, the practice of meditation, the examen of conscience, the vocation to the priesthood or religious state, and numberless other graces, are so many powerful helps to the acquisition of perfection?

Without entering into a detail of all the graces dispensed to us, we shall content ourselves with recalling one, the concession of which is more than sufficient to teach us how ardently the adorable Trinity desires our sanctification. This grace is the gift of His only Son, whom the Eternal Father sent upon earth 'to serve us as an example of virtue.'[1]

For the Word of God has not clothed Himself with our flesh merely to become our Saviour, but likewise to be our Divine Exemplar. For this reason it was that He performed all His actions, not only that they might

[1] Ruth iv. 11.

merit salvation for us, but also that they might be a lesson of piety for men. In the Old Law the Almighty had commanded us to be imitators of His sanctity; but while this pure and incomprehensible Spirit continued concealed in the depths of His essence, He could not be the model of our life; 'Wherefore, it was,' says St. Augustine, 'that this infinitely good Master "became man that He might be a guide to man."'

Thus Jesus Christ, wishing to show us that He was really come into the world to be our model, commences to act in the first moment of His mortal life, and 'He teaches afterwards that His example, at least, may stimulate us if we have been deaf to His precepts.'[1] For this loving Saviour, burning with zeal for our perfection, was not ignorant that 'example is more powerful than words, and that works are a more profitable lesson than the mere sound of the voice.'[2] Consequently He did not begin 'to teach until the latter years of His life,' while He had 'begun to act' the moment he appeared on earth. Behold why it was that the heavenly Father said, 'This is my beloved Son;'[3] 'I have given Him as an example,' that as He has done so you do also,'[4] tread therefore in His footsteps, for 'He is the way;' listen to Him, for 'He is the truth;' cling to Him, for 'He is the life.'[5] The better to understand how calculated the example of Jesus Christ is to excite us to perfection, let us image to ourselves His life as the very reverse of what it really was. If our Saviour, surrounded with all the insignia of royalty, the crown on His head, the sceptre in His hand, exhorted us to a love of contempt, voluntary poverty, renunciation of our

[1] St. Gregory. [2] St. Leo. [3] Matt. iii. 17.
[4] John xiii. 15. [5] Ibid. xiv. 6.

desires; if remaining at the foot of the holy and painful summits of virtue, He should verbally indicate to us the road which leads to the pinnacle of perfection, and smooth the hardships of the rugged path by His words alone, then the disgust which we entertain for sanctity might, perhaps, admit of some excuse.

But since Jesus Christ is Himself poor, despised, afflicted, and thus gives us in His own person a brilliant example of patience; since He Himself as our Chief walks at our head, since He does not ask us to do or suffer anything that we shall not see Him do and suffer before us, all our excuses vanish, and our confusion cannot but be increased by the generosity of the example He has left us. For to see Him walk before us laden with His Cross, and not to be emulous of following Him; to see Him reduced to such a state of poverty that 'He has not where to lay His head,'[1] and still to desire riches; to know that 'He has emptied Himself,'[2] 'that He has been a worm, and no man: the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people,'[3] and to ambition honours; to behold Him nailed to an infamous gibbet, scourged, crowned with thorns, become 'a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity,'[4] and to flatter our senses; to believe that Jesus Christ is our God, our King, our Lord, on whom our salvation and eternal felicity depend; that He has performed all His actions and endured all His sufferings to encourage us to follow in His footsteps, to inspire us with the love of contempt, poverty, penance, the renunciation of pleasures, honours, and riches: to believe these truths, to adore these mysteries, and yet to live attached to riches, the world, and the flesh; to love

[1] Luke ix. 58. [2] Philip. ii. 7. [3] Ps. xxi. 7. [4] Isaias liii. 3.

what Jesus hates, to hate what He loves, and not even to entertain a thought of endeavouring to imitate Him: 'to observe this conduct, and to be a Christian, obliged in consequence,' says Tertullian, 'to become another Jesus Christ by the imitation of His virtues and His life, this is so humiliating, so monstrous a contradiction between our lives and our faith, that it is impossible to palliate it.' This shameful opposition suffices so to confound our sloth, that if one drop of generous blood still remains in our veins, it will not be possible for us to resist our yearning desire to imitate our Model and Chief. Let us therefore acknowledge and appreciate the powerful aids afforded by the example of Jesus Christ for the practice of virtue.

In effect, should the example of our Saviour exercise less influence on us than that of a captain on his soldiers? See a general beloved by his army, foremost to spring on the hostile walls: all his troops simultaneously rush forward to follow him. And Christians alone would have the cowardice to shrink from following Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ, 'to whom all power is given in heaven and in earth;'[1] Jesus Christ 'at whose name every knee bows in heaven, on earth, and in hell;'[2] who promises us 'for the momentary and light tribulations of the present life an eternal weight of sublime and incomparable glory,'[3] and who will, should we desire it, empower us 'to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one!'[4] Where is the Christian so weak and dastardly as to refuse to serve under so great a king, to tread in His footsteps, to practise virtue, and 'fight the battles of the Lord?' Above all, when this good Master by the unction of His grace sweetens the arduousness of the labour, soothes

[1] Matt. xxviii. 18. [2] Philip. ii. 10. [3] 2 Cor. iv. 17. [4] Ephes. vi. 16.

suffering, 'makes the crooked straight, and the rough ways plain.'[1]

Assuredly they are altogether inexcusable who remain insensible to so moving an example, who hear what Jesus Christ has done without 'hungering and thirsting after justice.'[2] It is of them that the Divine Master shall be able to say: 'had I not come, had I not spoken to them,' had I not preceded them myself on the road to sanctity, 'they would not be culpable.' But now that they have so often read the history of my life and death in the Gospel; that they have seen me fastened naked to the Cross, overwhelmed with opprobrium and satiated with sufferings, 'they have no excuse for their sin.'[3] Yes, since Jesus Christ Himself has been the first to confront all kinds of misery and contempt; since He has been the first to drink of the torrent of afflictions; since 'He has trodden the bloody wine-press alone;' all those who refuse to imitate Him are destitute of excuse.

Let us go then, ingrates that we are, who live reckless of our sanctification: let us behold our God fastened to the frightful instrument of His torture. Let us listen to Him saying to us with an expiring voice: 'All is consummated;' and addressing Himself to His Father: 'My Father, I have finished the work that Thou hast given me to do.' I have accomplished Thy designs of mercy towards men. I have spared neither sufferings nor my own blood to inspire them with a love of solid virtue, with the desire of sanctity. That this soul might cease to walk in the way of tepidity, that it might refrain from the flesh-pots of Egypt, I have permitted my feet and hands to be pierced with nails; that it might learn to blush at being a delicate member under a head crowned with thorns, a cruel

[1] Luke iii. 5. [2] Matt. v. 6. [3] John xv. 22.

circlet has ensanguined my brows; that it might not flatter its flesh to the detriment of its spiritual interests, I have delivered up my whole body to blows and scourges, and yet, oh, heavens, be astonished! and yet, 'of what profit has been my blood' which I have shed?

Alas! I have laboured in vain, in vain have I been born in poverty, have spent my life in perpetual abjection, and died in the midst of the most cruel torments. This soul, oblivious of all my sacrifices, has not on that account been less avaricious of riches, honours, and worldly pleasures: it has not been less a slave to its bad passions. There has not been a drop of blood in my veins, a respiration of my chest, a vestige of strength in my limbs, or of life in my heart, which I have not willingly sacrificed, solely that that soul might devote its whole being to the acquisition of sanctity; and yet, notwithstanding all these helps, it has remained plunged in the slime of tepidity, without even an effort to emerge from it, because it has invariably assigned its perfection the last place in its esteem. Unfortunate that we are! what shall we one day reply to Jesus Christ when He reminds us of the example He has left us? What shall be our thoughts when we see ourselves compelled to own that we have rendered useless the powerful assistance given us for our sanctification? That all His sufferings have been useless, though He has done and endured so much for our perfection? That we have continued to give scandal by our pride, notwithstanding all the efforts of this Divine Model and the authority of His example? What sad remembrances! when we shall find that the sight of this loving Saviour fastened to the cross, which should be the foundation of our hope at the hour of death, does but increase our confusion and terror at this awful

moment. When instead of 'drawing waters with joy out of the Saviour's fountains,'[1] we shall find there only fear and mortal anguish? Once more, what sentiments should not these considerations awaken in us?

Alas! we shall then participate in the sentiments of the Royal Prophet when he uttered this sad lamentation, 'All the day long my shame is before me; and the confusion of my face covered me;'[2] for God wishes that we become holy: His commandment, the example of Jesus Christ, the authority of Scripture, all the graces that we receive, but above all others the graces of the divine example left us by our Redeemer, place this truth beyond all doubt. And yet, far from devoting ourselves as much as we ought to the acquisition of sanctity, our whole life has been but a continual neglect of this duty.

The Omnipotent God could not give us more effectual aid for the practice of virtue than that which we find in His only Son: He has granted Him to us through His infinite charity: He has sent this adorable Model from the highest heavens for our imitation; justly, therefore, may He say: 'What is there that I ought to do more to thee that I have not done?'[3] What is there more precious that I could bestow on Thee? and yet, of what avail have been my largesses? Notwithstanding the authority of a precept so solemnly promulgated, God has been unable to induce us to follow the example of Jesus Christ or to tread in the paths of virtue.

What is the cause of so great an evil? What the source of so deplorable a tepidity? It is that we do not love either God or Jesus Christ with sufficient fervour: it is that we do not hearken to the ordinances of our heavenly Father, and that we have not the courage to

[1] Isaias xii. 3. [2] Ps. xliii. 16. [3] Isaias v 4.

walk in the footsteps of His Son. Did we love them both, that love would give us wings to follow the Saviour: love would give us strength to obey God: it would sweeten all that is painful in the command, and difficult in the imitation. In a word, the love of God which exacts of us a solid piety, would enable us by its strength and sweetness to triumph over all the difficulties of virtue. 'For,' says Thomas à Kempis, 'love lightens all that is heavy, and supports with equanimity all the trials of life. It bears its burden without feeling its weight, it renders sweet and pleasing all that is bitter, it incites to noble actions, and it always urges to what is most perfect; it counts the labour as nothing; it attempts more than it can effect: never does it allege impossibility, because it believes that everything is possible and lawful to it.'[1]

Oh! who will give me to wing my flight to the thrones of the heavenly spirits? who will thaw the ice of my heart by inflaming it with the ardent love of these holy Intelligences. O Seraphim! cause one spark of this divine flame which rendered perfection so easy to the saints to fall upon me.

Article II.

God merits that we should become holy.

God merits that we should belong wholly to Him by the practice of solid virtue, for three reasons: 1. He gives Himself unreservedly to us, 2. Jesus Christ also gives Himself entirely to us; and 3, in giving ourselves wholly to Him, we give but little. From the development of these three points it will be easy for us to conclude that we should be holy; that is to say, to

[1] Imit. b. iii. ch. v.

belong entirely to God, and that the love with which our Lord favours us is a powerful incentive to us to endeavour to repay Him by labouring for our sanctification.

1. *Because God gives Himself to us without reserve*

We should consecrate ourselves to the Divine Majesty without any exception or interruption in our sacrifice; because God not only gives us all that belongs to Him, but He also gives us Himself without reserve and in the most perfect manner. Would that a Cherub, taking a burning coal off the heavenly altar, would purify my lips as he formerly purified those of Isaias, that I might worthily relate 'the wonders of the Lord.'[1] For in truth, 'He that is mighty hath done great things in us,'[2] when, according to His eternal and immutable designs, He hath given us temporal things to serve for our use, the angels to watch over us, grace to enable us to merit, and heaven as our reward. In reality, the earth, angels, grace, and heaven, are the four principal kinds of goods which the Sovereign Master seems to have created especially for us, and by which He has manifested to the universe the inexhaustible riches of His Omnipotence in our behalf. Like to the four fertile rivers 'which went out of the place of pleasure to water all the surface of the earth,'[3] they flow from the bosom of Infinite Bounty and unite all their treasures upon man, who is, as it were, the centre whereon the effusion of God's benefit terminates.

First. The Creator of the universe, 'who stretcheth out the heavens like a pavilion, and hath founded the earth on its own basis,'[4] has destined and bestowed all the

[1] Exod. xiv. 13. [2] Luke i. 49. [3] Gen. ii. 10, 6. [4] Wisd. vii. 16, 17.

works of the creation for the necessities of man, with a providence and liberality which display His love. It is for us that the sun shines, that the stars glitter in the firmament, and that the planets pursue their course in the heavens. It is for us that the vine produces its fruit, that the fields are covered with harvests, that the meadows display their verdure and their flowers. The pearls which glisten beneath the waves, the gold entombed within the mountain's side, the metals in the bosom of the earth, the fish in the waters, the flocks in the fields, the birds which people the air, have been created for us. The God 'who holds in His hands the virtues of the elements,'[1] extinguishes our thirst with the water, refreshes us with the air, nourishes and sustains us with the food which He bestows upon us. Therefore it is true to say, according to the beautiful expression of the Royal Prophet, that 'He has given the earth to the children of men,'[2] to inhabit it, possess it, and make it subservient to their wants, 'that He has set them over the works of His hands, that He has subjected under their feet all sheep and oxen, the beasts of the fields, the birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea.' Who can ever adequately extol such unbounded liberality and magnificence? 'Lord! what is man that Thou art mindful of him?' 'and the son of man,'[3] that Thou shouldst load him with so many benefits, notwithstanding his ingratitude?

The supreme Lord who reigns in the highest heavens, 'sitting on His throne, and all the army of heaven standing by Him on the right and on the left,'[4] has given us the angels as protectors; for says the apostle, 'all the angels are ministering spirits, sent to minister for them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation.'[5]

[1] Ps. cxiii. 16. [2] Ibid. viii. 7, 8. [3] Ibid. viii. 5.
[4] 2 Parlip. xviii. 18. [5] Heb. i. 14.

These princes of the heavenly Court are given us for masters to teach us the paths of justice, for guides to conduct, and protectors to defend us from our enemies during our pilgrimage.

Oh, my soul! 'the King of kings,'[1] 'that sitteth on the cherubim,'[2] 'has given His angels charge over thee: to keep thee in all thy ways.'[3]

'Oh, admirable condescension!' cries out St. Bernard in his astonishment, 'Oh, charity! Oh, unheard-of love! for, let us consider attentively, my brethren, who the deputies of God are, to whom He sends them, and what is the end of this mission. The Sovereign Majesty has deputed His angels, sublime and blessed spirits, the familiars and courtiers of the great King; He has deputed them to man, who is but a miserable worm of the earth, a little dust and ashes; He has sent them to guard us,' enlighten us in our doubts, to arouse us from our tepidity, raise us in our falls, cure us of our weakness, not occasionally, or in some particular places only, but 'to take care of us in all places, in all our ways, and in all our undertakings.' Oh, children of Adam! I appeal to your own conscience, what is there that our God can bestow on us more excellent and useful? What have we to fear under such protectors, who are at once 'faithful, prudent, and powerful,'[4] who possess the power, the knowledge, and the will to defend us. Oh heavens! who can worthily thank the Almighty for such illustrious guardians? But since human frailty is incapable of adequately acknowledging so great a benefit, let us at least implore the heavenly intelligences to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise in our behalf, in order that 'the smoke of incense shall ascend up before God from the hand of our

[1] Apoc. xix. 16. [2] Ps. xcviii. 1. [3] Ibid. xc. 11. [4] Serm. on Ps. xc.

angel guardian.'[1] With what prodigality does not the Father of light pour out His grace on us? He enlightens our blindness, stimulates our weakness, terrifies us by His threats, allures us by His promises: a hundred times repulsed, a hundred times He returns to the charge, to renew His entreaties. And though His graces are of inestimable value, since they are the price of the blood of Jesus Christ and in some sort the emanations of divine love, still this Divine Lord, in the hope of gaining a soul, does not deign the less to bestow on it the boundless treasures of His merciful condescension.

Night and day the Good Shepherd pursues through rugged and impracticable paths the sheep that flies from Him; and though ungrateful man closes his ear to the sweetness of that loving voice, still the Saviour does not cease to call, to caress, and to seek to win him back. Man, all bruised as he is, repulses the hand that longs to heal him, and yet, notwithstanding his resistance, the charitable Samaritan never wearies of pouring wine and oil upon his wounds. He has communicated to us, says the prince of the apostles, the precious benefits contained in His promises, in making us become by habitual grace 'partakers of the divine nature,'[2] so that the Beloved Disciple, transported with joy at such a prodigy, cries out: 'Behold how great hath been the charity of God for us, that He hath called us, and we are in effect the children of God.'[3] How exalted is this prerogative which makes us the children of God! to understand its dignity, it would be necessary to be able to measure the infinite perfection of Him whom we have a right to name our Father. Finally, in His love, the divine remunerator of good works destines heaven for us—heaven—that is to say, a

[1] Apoc. viii. 4. [2] 2 Pet. i. 4. [3] 1 John iii. 2.

place of eternal happiness, where He Himself shall be our recompense, our crown, our joy, and our 'reward exceeding great,'[1] where through pure beneficence and liberality He will communicate to us His beauty, 'we shall be like to Him;'[2] His felicity, 'we shall eat and drink at His table;'[3] His glory, 'He shall make us sit with Him on His throne.'[4] But what words could express the sublimity of such happiness, since the apostle assures us, that 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him.'[5] 'Oh, how good is God to Israel, to them that are of a right heart!'[6] He has bestowed on us the four principal kinds of created blessings: He has given us the earth for our use, the angels for our protectors, grace to enable us to merit, heaven to be our reward. 'Let us praise the Lord, then, for He is good, let us sing to His name,'[7] 'for He hath covered us with His love as with a shield.' He has crowned us with the multitude of His benefits. O Lord! since Thou placest all Thy goods at my disposal, I also desire that all that belongs to me should be Thine, that Thou become the absolute Master of my liberty, my understanding, my will, and my senses. Accursed be the drop of blood in my veins which flows not for Thee. Anathema to all that belongs to me without belonging to Thee!

Secondly. Not alone does this bountiful God grant us all that is His, but with an incomprehensible generosity He likewise gives us Himself without reserve. He admirably communicates to us His perfections, which, from their identity with His nature, as the

[1] Gen. xv. 1. [2] 1 John iii. 2. [3] Luke xxii. 30. [4] Apoc. iii. 21.
[5] 1 Cor. ii. 9. [6] Ps. lxxii. 1. [7] Ps. cxxxiv. 3.

theologians express it, form but one and the same thing with Him.

He abandons His being and essence to us, by remaining constantly and intimately present in our body and in our soul as in a temple which He has consecrated to Himself: 'as He Himself saith, I will dwell in them;'[1] and according to this doctrine of the apostle: 'You are the temple of the living God:' and elsewhere: 'it is in Him we live, move, and be.'

He lavishes His power on us in creating and preserving us and in concurring incessantly in all our actions, according as it suits us to perform them: 'for God worketh all in all;'[2] so that 'without Him we can do nothing.'[3]

He places His providence at our disposal by the singular affection with which He preserves us from evil, procures our good, and 'makes even temptation itself turn to our advancement.'[4]

He has even utilized for us the severity of His justice, 'which spared not the angels that sinned, but delivered them drawn down by ropes to the lower hell unto torments, that their punishment might be an example to the impious.'[5] He encompasses us with His mercy, 'in overlooking our sins' so often and for such a length of time, in order to await 'our repentance;' so that the prophet does not hesitate to exalt 'His mercy above all His works.'

It is true, therefore, that this great God gives Himself wholly to us, since He so liberally communicates His attributes to us, and so constantly makes them subservient to our wants. Above all, He communicates to

[1] 2 Cor. vi. 16. [2] 1 Cor. xii. 6. [3] John xv. 5.
[4] 1 Cor. x. 13. [5] 2 Pet. ii. 4, 6.

us His boundless charity and purely gratuitous predilection, in choosing us, despite our unworthiness and His foreknowledge of the countless sins we should commit, in order to call us to the perfection conformable to our state, and to destine us to a corresponding degree of glory, in preference to so many others who would have corresponded more faithfully with His grace. In His ardent zeal for our souls, He has diffused a salutary bitterness into our evil passions, He has purposely subjected us to the trials of adversity, He has rendered our falls more painful, He has caused us to experience the perfidy of creatures in order to inspire us with disgust for them, He has, in a word, attracted us by the bonds of love when we were straying away from Him. But the 'charity of God,' says St. John, 'has' especially 'appeared,'[1] in that 'He has so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son'[2] 'that He might redeem us from all iniquity and might cleanse to Himself a people acceptable;' and in His sending us the Holy Ghost 'that He might teach us all truth.'[3] Thus it is that this great God, in virtue of the unity of nature of the three august Persons, has given, delivered, and lavished Himself wholly and in His entire Being for us. For, since 'He spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him for us all,'[4] 'how hath He not also given us all things?' and with the Holy Ghost how could He have failed to fill us with the plenitude of the seven gifts of which this Divine Spirit is the Author? O infinite goodness! O merciful charity, which all the choirs of angels 'adore in silence.'[5] Yes; these are so many striking proofs

[1] John iv. 9. [2] Ibid. iii. 16. [3] Titus ii. 14.
[4] John xvi. 13. [5] Apoc. viii. 1.

that God gives Himself with all that belongs to Him, wholly to us, and consequently that He has an indisputable right to demand the absolute consecration of all we possess to Him by the practice of solid virtue.

Thirdly. But these rights become still more incontestable when we consider the manner in which He gives all these favours, and in which He gives Himself wholly to us; for these three qualities of His love exceedingly enhance the value of so great a gift.

The first is that His tenderness for us is eternal: 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love.'[1] Words which contain this pithy meaning: 'My love for thee is coexistent with that which I bear myself, and shall endure as long, since from all eternity I resolved to bestow, to lavish myself and all that I possess on thee.'

The second is that His bounty is purely gratuitous: 'God has manifested His bounty for us in that it is not we that have loved, but it is He hath first loved us;'[2] and when we were 'His enemies.'[3] 'He has loved us of Himself,'[4] without having any need of us, without His deriving any benefit therefrom, for 'He stands in no need of our goods.'[5] He finds nothing in us that belongs to us save nothingness and sin, that is to say, nothing but what is calculated to excite His hatred rather than to win His love.

Finally, the third quality of this generous love is that it is infinite. Considered in its nature, it is identical with that with which this Omnipotent Being loves Himself, with which He loves the adorable Trinity, with which He loves Jesus Christ and the saints. For He loves thee, oh, my soul, with His whole self, with

[1] Jerem. xxxi. 3. [2] 1 John iv. 10. [3] Numb. xxiv. 8.
[4] Osee xiv. 5. [5] Ps. xv. 2.

all the infinitude of His nature; so that there is no perfection in His Divinity, no Person in the Trinity, that does not love thee with all the boundless extent of His charity! The benefits of His providence extend to all men, but without any diminution in thy regard; for this tender Father 'maketh His sun to rise upon the good and the bad, and raineth upon the just and unjust;'[1] He 'heaps the coals' of His burning love 'on the heads of His enemies;'[2] He excludes no one, how guilty soever he may be, from the gifts of His universal munificence.

Since God gives Himself and all that belongs to Him so unreservedly to us, what conclusion should we come to? What resolution should we form? Is it not just that we should live wholly for Him who desires to belong wholly to us? Does not He who has been so infinitely liberal to us in His donation of Himself, merit that we endeavour to become holy by the sacrifice of the created object which opposes the greatest obstacle to our perfection? We are unworthy the name of man if we presume to refuse anything to so munificent a benefactor. But if we love, we will refuse nothing: and 'we will love' if we impress deeply on our minds the truths we have just been meditating. What! can we not repay by a return of love Him who has first loved us? Are our hearts incapable of expanding in devoted affection for Him who, from all eternity, has loved us with an infinite love?

This Omnipotent God, who has no need of anyone, has encompassed us with His benefits as with a strong army, to overcome the obduracy of our heart; He 'hath crowned us with mercy and compassion'[3] in order to conquer us

[1] Matt. v. 45. [2] Prov. xxv. 22. [3] Ps. cii. 4

and to obtain of us a reciprocity of love. This exalted Majesty loves us with an ineffable love; He places His perfections, His Son and Holy Spirit at our disposal, solely that we may return Him love for love, and yet we remain plunged in icy indifference!

Wretched that we are! We love a fellow-creature who loves us; nay, we appreciate the caresses of a vile animal, and we love not that God who loads us with benefits and who loves us sovereignly! A fellow-creature needs but to speak to us kindly to win our affections. Well! God embraces us, resuscitates us in His Bosom, cherishes us, enriches us, and lavishes favours on us, and we make Him no return of love! This all-gracious God exhausts His wisdom and omnipotence to testify His tenderness towards us by the effusion of His benefits, insomuch that were His happiness dependent on our love, were we the god of God, He could not love us more ardently, or be more prodigal of His favours, and yet we languish in an ungrateful tepidity! Our cowardice deems the least act of generosity in His service too painful, it shrinks from the least sacrifice that would evince our fidelity and gratitude to Him, it fears to enter the path of perfection.

Far from us be so great, so shameful an ingratitude! Let us rather cast our eyes on the multiplied favours with which the divine bounty has loaded us; let us hearken to the voice of the Beloved crying out to us in Ecclesiasticus: 'Give and receive to justify your soul;' or else, according to another lesson: 'receive and render, receive benefits and render obedience, receive kindness and render gratitude, in order to justify thy soul and make it increase daily in sanctity.' The love of God which gives itself entirely to us with all His gifts, and

which merits by this liberality that we should labour for our sanctification, is then truly a powerful spur to advance incessantly in the paths of virtue.

2. *Because Jesus Christ has also given Himself unreservedly to us.*

A second motive for loving God, an infinitely powerful reason for labouring for our perfection, is that Jesus Christ has also given Himself wholly to us on the Cross and in the Eucharist. In order the better to appreciate, oh my soul! the magnitude of the stupendous sacrifice by which He immolated Himself completely for us, in order the better to measure its immense extent, 'let us go to the mountain of myrrh,'[1] that is to say, to Calvary; and with hearts burning with love, 'let us look on the face of our Christ'[2] offered by a voluntary sacrifice as a victim on the altar of the Cross; there we shall behold Him sacrificing for love of us, to the thirst of poverty, humiliation, and suffering, the gifts which are dearest and most precious to man; we shall see Him despoiled of His clothes, wounded in His honour, and deprived of life, and all for love of us!

1. To restore to us the robe of innocence which we lost, this Divine 'Jonathan, who loved us as His own soul, stripped Himself of the coat with which He was clothed,'[3] and on the day 'of His' spiritual 'nuptials'[4] which was that of His death, this heavenly 'Bridegroom' showed Himself covered with His 'blood'[5] as with the royal purple; He expired naked on an infamous gibbet, to teach us to present to Him a heart divested of all attachment to earth and creatures.

[1] Cant. iv. 6. [2] Ps. lxxxiii. 10. [3] 1 Kings xviii. 3, 4.
[4] Cant. i. 11. [5] Exod. iv. 25.

This absolute self-abnegation has, more than every other mystery, revealed to us the immense depth of His love for us. For in preferring a stable to a palace, the vesture of the poor to the purple of kings, indigence to opulence, He did but reduce tc practice the doctrine by which He declares the poor of spirit blessed: and in despising the kingdoms of the world which the devil offered Him, He upheld the dignity befitting Him who is the Omnipotent Lord of heaven. Consequently, it is not surprising that He loved to be surrounded by the poor, since His 'kingdom is not of this world.'[1] But that through love of us He should consent to carry His Cross before an entire people who loaded Him with opprobrium and insults, that He should bear the humiliations of nudity so painful to His incomparable innocence, behold the prodigy, behold the excess of His tenderness and devotedness to men.

Thou knowest all this, O my soul! and yet thou still findest it difficult to consent to the least self-renunciation; thou incessantly deferrest to divest thyself of the old man and of thy affection for trifles, in order to clothe thyself with Jesus Christ; thou attachest to creatures that heart which was born for heaven, thou holdest it enslaved by earthly bonds! Ah! if thou wilt not follow thy Saviour in His absolute spoliation, remember the threats of the prophet, beware of exchanging 'the vesture of glory' for the 'mantle of malediction.'[2]

2. But, not satisfied with this first sacrifice of His love for man, Jesus Christ allows His reputation to be outrageously attacked; and though, according to St. Thomas, 'honour be the most excellent of exterior goods, on account of its affinity to virtue,'[3] of which it is the

[1] John xviii. 36. [2] Ps. cviii. 18. [3] 2. 2, q. 129, a. 1.

legitimate reward, still this charitable Saviour abandons His completely, by selecting the kind of death which was at that time the most vile and infamous. The Lord of the universe, fastened to an ignominious gibbet, suffered on a mountain, suspended between heaven and earth, that He might be exposed to the view, the railleries, and the insults of the entire people, that the calumnies of the pharisees and the blasphemies of the scribes might be the more audible to Him. He suffered during the Paschal solemnity, during which the Jews assembled in Jerusalem from all parts of the universe; He suffered at the gates of this capital, and at noon-day, that His dishonour might be the more public, and that all His enemies might be present; He suffered between two thieves, that He might pass for the vilest of men. Yes; His love seems to have been ingenious in combining every circumstance capable of completing His dishonour, and thus enhancing the value of His sacrifice. And yet, reckoning all these opprobriums as nothing, our humble Redeemer generously sacrificed His reputation solely to induce us to immolate to Him the punctiliousness in points of honour, which is the origin of the greater number of our quarrels and enmities. If, after such an example, we still dare to yield to pride, to dread contempt, to avenge injuries, to be perpetually hankering after self-aggrandisement, do we not richly deserve that 'we should be clothed with confusion as with a cloak?'[1]

3. The charity of our Divine Master carries Him to a still greater excess. He offers His body as a victim in our place, He abandons it to the most bitter anguish, to the scourging, to unheard-of tortures, in order to appease the justice of God offended by our sins, and to

[1] Ps. cviii. 29.

undergo the punishment which we have merited. Let us gaze for a moment with mournful tenderness on this spectacle of sorrow and of love!

Behold, oh, my soul! the hands and feet of thy Redeemer cruelly transfixed with nails, His veins broken, His sinews violently extended, His head pierced with sharp thorns, His lips saturated with gall, His side pitilessly opened with a spear. In the midst of these intolerable bodily sufferings, and the overwhelming anguish of His soul, the all-amiable Son is abandoned by His Father; in a word, it is amid the mourning of all nature that the innocent Jesus, delivered up by an iniquitous judge to the barbarity of His executioners, expires for the salvation of the world!

In all His Body there is not one member, in all His members not one bone, not one artery, not one vein, not one nerve, not even a fibre which He has not delivered up to suffering for us, to maintain the rights of Divine Justice, and to teach us to cease to be the slaves of sensuality. For love of us and to free us from carnal affections, He has contrived to find particular torments for all the members of His body and all the faculties of His soul. As a pledge of His boundless tenderness, He has made us an irrevocable donation of His own life, asking nothing of us in return except 'that we no longer live to ourselves, but to Him who has died for us.'[1]

Oh, truly inconceivable prodigy of the charity of a God! The Gospel assures us that 'greater love than this no man hath, to lay down his life for his friends;'[2] but did not Jesus Christ evidently carry His still farther, when He gave up His beautiful life, His divine

[1] 2 Cor. v. 15. [2] John x. 13.

life; when He terminated it by so cruel a death, sacrificing it to the interests of His enemies and His rebellious slaves? Can we deny that He gave Himself entirely to us on the Cross, when for our sake He consented to be despoiled of His clothes in order to have no other covering than His blood, when He so utterly relinquished to us His honour and His life? consequently, can we deny that He merits under every title that we imitate His sanctity and belong unreservedly to Him?

4. In the Eucharist, by a permanent miracle, He continues, perfects, completes this donation. There it is that the amiable Jesus gives us, not that seamless garment wrought by a human hand, but those Eucharistic shades under which He so lovingly veils Himself: there it is that He sacrifices to us not merely the reputation of the Son of man, but even the dignity of the Man God, by concealing His Majesty under the weak appearances of the sacred species and by publicly exposing it to so many insults.

He delivers to us His body, no longer subject to sufferings and death, but impassible, immortal and glorious. His flesh and blood are not only a sacrifice and salutary bath for us, they are likewise our food and our drink, He is Himself at once our exemplar and our remedy in all our evils. Finally, He reduces Himself to the state of victim to such a degree as to lose in His Sacrament the use of His natural faculties, so that He can neither see, nor hear, nor speak, nor feel, nor move; and this prodigy, by which He sacrifices the exercise of His senses to us without any requital, He will continue to the end of time. There is absolutely nothing in Him which does not belong to us with a perfect right, and

not even the highest intelligence of the angels could imagine a more perfect manner in which He could give Himself to us.

Since Jesus Christ, oh, heavenly spirits, envy not our happiness! since Jesus Christ, I say, has given Himself to us, since He has left Himself completely at our disposal, who could carry his insensibility and ingratitude so far as to pretend that we do not owe Him a return, that we are not obliged to repay Him love for love? The law of retaliation formerly authorised 'tooth for tooth, eye for eye,'[1] and the law of charity would only require heart for heart; especially, when our Beloved so frequently condescends to the entreaty, '*My child, give me thy heart!*'[2] Weigh, O man, the value of these words! There is nothing in Jesus Christ which does not belong to us: His body is ours, It has been wounded for us; His blood is ours, It has been shed for us; His life is ours, It has been delivered up to death for us; His merits are ours, they have been bequeathed to us in His dying testament. In a word, He has given Himself unreservedly on the Cross, He has given Himself wholly in the Eucharist. 'He has been prodigal of His love towards men,'[3] says the Council of Trent; and all powerful and all wise as He is, He knows nothing, He can give us nothing better; 'for what could He offer us more precious than Himself?'[4] Since such is the case, since our Saviour so ardently desires, and merits by so many titles, a mutual love on our part which powerfully incites us to sanctity, let us see what remains for us to do. But let us, in the first place, consider and firmly believe that even in giving Him all that we are, we give but little.

[1] Job ii. 4. [2] Prov. xxiii. 26. [3] Sess. xiii. ch. ii. [4] St. Bern. on Cant.

3. *Because in giving everything to God we give Him but little.*

This truth is the third motive which should determine us to serve God by the practice of solid virtue. Mark well, therefore, the exposition we are about to make of this subject. I say that in giving everything to God we give Him but little. This is proved as follows: We give but little if we consider the vileness of him who gives: for what is man but 'the least grain in the balance, and as a drop of the morning dew?'[1] little, if we reflect on the majesty of Him to whom we give, who is sovereignly independent, and who suffices to Himself without standing in need of any one, for, 'what doth it profit God if we be just? or what do we give Him if our way be unspotted?'[2] little, if we compare what we give with the magnitude and multiplicity of the blessings which Heaven has bestowed upon us, and at the same time the number and grievousness of the sins we have committed. Yes, 'all our justices shall appear as soiled linen,'[3] they shall vanish as a deceitful shadow in sight of the infinite liberality; little, or rather nothing, if we contrast it with what seculars do for the world, what the saints have done for God, and with what Heaven deserves, since, 'the sufferings of the present life bear no proportion to that weight of glory that is prepared for us.'[4] We are forced, therefore, to bewail our absolute indigence, and to own that in giving all we give but little, or rather that we give nothing. But if it is true that in giving all we give nothing; that in doing all we do nothing; if 'we are unprofitable servants,'[5] what must it be to refuse

[1] Wisd. xi. 23. [2] Job xxii. 3. [3] Isaias lxiv. 6.
[4] Numb. viii. 18. [5] Luke xvii. 10.

this little, or to divide it between God and creatures, and not to be willing to immolate it to His Divine Majesty? Oh heavens! 'if the Lord rejected Saul, so that He was no longer King of Israel because he spared Agag;'[1] 'if Achan was stoned, if all that belonged to him was consumed by fire, because he appropriated something that had been cursed,'[2] and which should have been sacrificed without reserve before the Ark; if Ophni and Phineas perished by the sword for having reserved a part of the victim instead of immolating the entire of it, what will befall us who have 'a double heart,'[3] 'who halt between two sides,'[4] who spare now one passion, now another, as the faithless Israelite spared the Ammonites?

What! shall we alone present an imperfect and maimed offering to the King of kings with impunity? Shall we alone be permitted to steal with sacrilegious hand a portion of the sacrifice, the entire of which belongs to God? Shall we possess the privilege of making a compact between nature and grace, to assign to our actions a part to piety and at the same time allow our evil propensities to exercise their empire over our soul? We, I say, whom the sanctity of our state, the sublimity of our vocation, the obligations contracted by our vows, oblige so strictly and by such just titles to belong wholly to God? Oh, how forcibly does the mute eloquence of Ananias and Sapphira preach to us from the depths of the tomb of the dangers of such rashness! Let us therefore speedily detest all division of our soul, if we would avert the chastisement of Divine Justice. Since we cannot effect great things, let us at least do

[1] 1 Kings xv. 9, 26.
[2] Josue vii. 20, 25.
[3] Eccli. ii. 14.
[4] 3 Kings xviii. 21.

the little that we can; since we have nothing precious to offer, let us at least give the little that we possess: but let us give that little unreservedly; let us give it, 1, because God gives Himself entirely to us; 2, because Jesus Christ has likewise given Himself to us; and 3, because in giving Him all, we give but little. It is by these three motives as by a triple bond that divine love will enchain and attract us to the practice of solid virtue. O Divine Lover of souls! Thou who givest Thyself wholly to us, but who acceptest not a divided heart, who absolutely renouncest it the moment we wish to admit a rival with thee in it, what shall I render to Thee if I give Thee not myself? Yes, I promise to do so, and all the blessed in heaven are witnesses of it; I will henceforward belong wholly to Thee, Thou shalt be the sole master of my heart; neither the world nor self-love shall any longer have any part in it. Let this predominant passion cease to reign over me; let this depraved desire die, which has till now enthralled my soul; let the flesh rebel; let hell, shuddering with rage, oppose it; let my senses vent themselves in murmurs: it matters not, I am resolved; let this depraved desire die; let God alone reign in my soul; let Jesus Christ alone live in me, and let the divine love triumph; let the love of God, which deserves that I should practise sanctity, remove all the obstacles thereto; let it overcome all difficulties; let it level all heights; let my perfection be henceforth my one and only important occupation. Why delayest thou, oh, my soul? What! dost thou still deliberate upon it? Why continuest thou undecided? Is it then so great a misfortune to belong wholly to God? Thou sufficest for God, and God would not suffice for Thee! But what fellowship hath light

with darkness, what concord hath Christ with Belial ?'[1] In a word, what comparison can exist between that creature whom thou lovest, between that object of thy human respect and the Supreme Majesty, that thou shouldest consent to reserve a place for them in thy heart, to the prejudice of thy God ? If thou bestowest thyself entirely, dost thou give an equivalent for what thou hast received ? Alas ! all that thou possessest is nothing, and this nothing thou hesitatest to consecrate to Him ? Hadst thou a thousand hearts they would not be sufficient to love God as He deserves ; thou possessest but one, and that so narrow ! and still thou darest to divide it ? Where then is thy justice, where thy gratitude ?

Thou hast conquered, O most amiable God ! I yield myself up the willing captive of Thy love, my heart is due to Thee alone. Henceforth sin, tepidity, my predominant passion shall be expelled thence for ever ; self-love shall be irrevocably excluded from it. I will suffer no movement therein which shall not tend to Thee alone. This device, ' God wills, God merits, that I become holy,' shall be the spur which shall compel me to hasten with rapid strides in the paths of virtue. In order that my deeds may correspond with my promises, I will, from this very day, begin a more regular life by such an heroic action. I only implore of Thy infinite goodness with all the humility and earnestness of my soul that Thou deign to accept the holocaust of my heart and to bless as a sacrifice of an agreeable odour the resolution which I take of labouring to acquire virtue ; and since Thou hast inspired me with the will to offer Thee this promise, grant me also the grace necessary for its accomplishment.

[1] 2 Cor. vi 14, 15.

Article III.

Of the marks of divine love and of self-love.

From all that has just been said, it is evident that the love of God, which demands and merits that we tend to perfection, is not only a powerful incentive, but also a very effectual aid to its attainment. For, as St. Augustine beautifully expresses it, 'where love exists we no longer experience any difficulty, but only sweetness and delights,'[1] which temper all bitterness, and render all that is painful in the practice of virtue easy and pleasing. What ought to inspire us with an exalted idea of the excellence of holy love is that it is the queen of virtues, 'the plenitude of the law,' and 'the fulfilment of justice;' it is incomparably more precious than faith and hope, for 'the greatest of the three is charity.'[2] 'Love,' says St. Augustine, 'assumes the character of the object beloved. Your love is righteous if you love good; vicious if you love evil; excellent if you love the Sovereign Good; vain if you love vanity; terrestrial if you love the world; divine if you love God.' These are certain proofs of the superiority of charity over all other virtues.

But this very pre-eminence is the great incentive to the devil, our relentless enemy, to exert all his skill in order to dim, by his deceitful colouring, the lustre of this heavenly gem, and to substitute self-love in our souls for the love of God. To defeat his artifices let us examine the principal marks of divine love and of self-love; let us learn their distinctive characteristics, the

[1] St. Aug. Solil. [2] Serm. on Cant.

more surely to discern and separate the pure and 'precious' from that which is 'vile'[1] and contemptible.

1. *The marks of divine love.*

The first mark of real love is a faithful and constant observance of the commandments of God to whatever degree they are obligatory; under pain of venial as well as mortal sin; so that we would scruple to offend God, at least deliberately, even in little things. Scripture teaches us, both in the Old and the New Law, that this is the first mark of divine love: 'Those who love the Lord will observe His ways,'[2] or His law: 'it is in this that we know Him, that is to say, that we love Him, if we keep His commandments.'[3] But, on the contrary, 'whoever saith that he knows,' that is to say, that he loves, without keeping His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but if any one keep His word, the love of God is really perfect in him.' This truth is confirmed by the authority of the word of Jesus Christ Himself: 'He who receives my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me;'[4] the contrary conclusion is easily drawn: 'he who keeps them not, loves not.' In order that 'the world might know that,' this Divine Saviour 'loved His Father,'[5] 'He always did what was pleasing to Him.' Scripture, or rather the Holy Ghost Himself, testifies that the observance of the commandments of God, is a certain mark of true love.

Let us examine, therefore, whether we possess this first characteristic of divine charity. Is our 'love strong as death?' Is it such that the 'many waters' of earthly

[1] Jerem. xv. 19. [2] Eccli. ii. 18. [3] 1 John ii. 3 and.
[4] John xiv. 21. [5] Ibid. xiv. 31.

pleasures cannot 'quench,' or 'the floods' of evil temptations 'drown'[1] and dissipate it? Such was the ardent love of the Doctor of the nations, who mockingly defied hell to let loose its utmost rage against him when he cried out: 'What shall separate me from the love of Jesus Christ?' 'tribulations?' 'afflictions?' 'hunger?' 'nakedness?' 'dangers?' 'persecutions?'[2] This holy apostle was not less resolute in acts than intrepid in words. 'Neither the law of sin, which revolted in his members,'[3] 'nor the sting of the flesh, nor the angel of Satan which buffeteth him;'[4] neither the assaults nor artifices of the demon could make Paul deviate for one moment from the way of charity; he triumphed gloriously over all those obstacles.[5]

Is our heart full of this noble generosity? Is adversity the oil and wood which inflame and preserve in us the fire of love? Are we, as well as St. Paul, 'certain that neither life nor death, nor things present nor future, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, can separate us from the charity'[6] of God? Let us reflect and test our love by this touchstone.

Oh, what a misfortune! 'if for a little barley and a morsel of bread'[7] 'for some lentils,'[8] 'for a leaf which is carried away by the wind,'[9] 'a drop of honey, we abandon God our Creator;'[10] 'if we cast Him behind us;'[11] 'if we return Him evil for good and hatred as the price of His love;'[12] if, forsaking this heavenly spouse, our soul 'deliver itself up to disorderly affections,'[13] and abandon itself to illicit desires; if, despising the Ark of the Covenant, it sacrifice to Dagon; and if, through so non-

[1] Cant. viii. 6, 7. [2] Numb. viii. 35. [3] Ibid. vii. 23. [4] 2 Cor. xii. 7.
[5] Rom. viii. 37. [6] Ibid. viii. 38. [7] Ezech. xiii. 19.
[8] Gen. xxv. 34. [9] Isaias xl. 17. [10] 1 Kings xiv. 43.
[11] Deut. xliii. 15. [12] Ezech. xxiii. 35. [13] Ps. cxviii. 5.

sensical a motive it offend Him who is infinitely amiable! Now is not this our state? Far from being confirmed in charity like the apostle, perhaps we have not even acquired the first degree of it, which consists in the horror and avoidance of sin and of all that is displeasing in the sight of infinite sanctity. Lord, 'set Thy Spirit' as a spirit of love 'in the midst of us, that we may walk in Thy ways and observe Thy ordinances;'[1] 'engrave them on the tables of my heart'[2] 'as Thou didst formerly engrave them' with Thy finger 'on the tables of stone on Mount Sinai;'[3] engrave them so deeply there that they may never be obliterated, that I may never transgress or forget them; that this single word, 'that displeases God,' may be to me as an invulnerable shield against the wounds of sin.

2. True love not only causes us to avoid all that offends the object beloved, but it is also the mainspring of all that we do to please Him; so that in doing what is agreeable to Him we are actuated solely by the desire of giving Him pleasure. Purity of intention in all our works is therefore a second characteristic of true charity. 'He who is perfect in charity,' says St. Clement of Alexandria, 'does good through the motive of the love of God: God is the most important, nay, the only end of all the works'[4] of him who loves. Whoever proposes any other end to himself does not love the Sovereign Goodness as he should; for, adds St. Bernard, 'all love is suspicious the moment it is influenced by the hope of any other good than that of loving;' and the same saint concludes that 'God should be loved' independently of the hope of recompense. For true charity is not mer-

[1] Ezech. iii. 5.
[2] Ibid. xxxvi. 26.
[3] Prov. vii. 3.
[4] Book of Stromat.

cenary; 'it does not seek its own interests; true love suffices to itself; it is its own reward; it seeks nothing but the object beloved.'[1] Such are the thoughts on which the heart of St. Bernard delighted to dwell. They, at the same time, contain a manifest proof that purity of intention is an infallible mark of pure love.

Though the whole world should be overturned, though the 'cataracts of heaven should be opened'[2] to extinguish hell by the waters of a new deluge, though the earth should rend its bosom and launch forth the fire of its volcanoes against heaven, still all these catastrophes, awful as they are, would be unable to affect either the sentiments or conduct of him who truly loves God. When the good works which He has undertaken with the purest intention fail to produce the results he expected from them, he continues as calm and unruffled as though his efforts had been crowned by the happiest success. But, on the contrary, whoever allows himself to be easily disturbed, shows that a vitiated intention has mingled itself with his actions to rob them of their merit; that he seeks human applause as much as the approbation of God; and, in fine, that he is in a state of tepidity but little compatible with true charity.

Let us examine whether we are not attacked by this disease; whether divine love is the principle, mainspring, and sole end of our actions; whether our works, begun in the first instance in the presence of God and for God, do not terminate in the researches of self-love and self-gratification. Let us faithfully observe the rule laid down for us by the apostle, and 'perform all our works through charity;'[3] 'and whether we eat or drink, or whatever else we do, do all for the glory of

[1] Serm. on Cant. [2] Gen. xi. 7. [3] 1 Cor. xvi. 14.

God.'[1] In reality, could there be a more legitimate obligation imposed upon us? For 'none of us lives for himself, but for the Lord.'[2] It is just, therefore, that no one should work for himself, but that all labour for Him by whom they live. Finally, continues the same apostle, we belong, not to ourselves, 'but to the Lord.' Consequently we should fructify for God, since all laws ensure to the proprietor of an estate the fruits that are gathered off it.

O God! whose bounty has drawn us from nothing, 'Thou justly demandest that the whole man should be consecrated to Thee, since Thou alone hast formed man; we do not adequately love Thee, therefore, when we love anything else with Thee for its own sake,' or when we cease to act and breathe for Thee alone. 'Oh beauty ever ancient and always new, too late,' too weakly, and too imperfectly 'have I loved Thee.'[3] But I desire to redeem lost time by the fervour of my love; from this moment I love Thee, oh, my infinitely perfect God, with my whole heart, with my whole soul, with all my strength, purely for Thy infinite goodness; I desire never again to perform any action which shall not tend constantly and solely to Thee. Henceforward Thy holy love shall be the principle, the soul and the end of all my works.

3. The third mark of pure charity is conformity of our will with that of God. For, according to the doctrine of St. Denis the Areopagite, 'love is a virtue which tends to unite not only equals with equals, but also what is inferior with what is superior.' This union is only effected by the conformity of will in which two persons who love each other merge their sentiments, wishes, desires, and

[1] 1 Cor. x. 31. [2] Rom. xiv. 7, 8. [3] St. Aug. Conf. 1. 10.

fears. 'Our mind,' says St. Bernard, 'forms but one with that of God when our soul not merely wishes solely what God wishes, but when it can no longer wish anything but what God wishes.' Thence it follows that charity eminently consists in this conformity of wills as the cause in its effect, and is the certain indication of it. Experience teaches that love renders two hearts conformable if they are not so already. Whoever loves God perfectly, therefore, necessarily contracts a perfect resemblance to and conformity with Him. But this happy identification shall never be realised in the division of wills. It is impossible, then, to conceive true charity without this concord of hearts; for it is absurd to pretend that we love and are united in heart when there is a contrariety in the will. Consequently, where this union of wills exists not, it is vain to seek for real love; but, on the contrary, wherever this union exists, it is certain that mutual love must be its fruit. 'True love,' says St. Ignatius, 'consists in a reciprocal communication of knowledge, riches, honours, and all kinds of goods'[1] between two persons who 'love' each other. But, without this entire sacrifice of our liberty, this perfect communication of goods no longer exists between God and us; thenceforward there is no longer any solid love.

Whatever else we may give to God, should we refuse Him our will, we give Him nothing; for our heavenly Spouse asks not our goods, it is ourselves He desires to possess. Now, we shall never give ourselves so long as we retain the best part of ourselves, which is our will. 'He loves his Creator perfectly,' says St. Gregory the Great, 'who refuses Him nothing of all that he possesses.' But whoever retains his will, the noblest part

[1] St. Ignat. Spiritual Exercises.

of the soul, keeps his entire self, and therefore does not love God perfectly. Let us confidently conclude from this doctrine that, without conformity of the will of man with that of God, true charity cannot exist; and that, on the contrary, this conformity is a certain sign of charity. Let us now summon our will, this principal part of ourselves, before the tribunal of our conscience, let us interrogate it, and see in what it differs from the Divine Will. Let us endeavour to discover what God wishes that we should do and what we refuse to do; let us examine what natural affection He desires we should immolate to Him, and from which our heart will not consent to separate itself. Do we accept of adversity with the same equanimity of soul as did Job and Heli? and do their heroic words, 'The Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord:'[1] 'He is the Lord, let it happen as it pleaseth Him,'[2] serve us as a rampart against the most unforeseen and painful events?

Let us consult our dispositions: would we prefer to be a vile worm rather than the highest seraph, were such the will of God? Would we elect to accomplish this Divine Will by remaining useless instead of labouring to diffuse the light of faith throughout the universe contrary thereto? Would we prefer the most excruciating sufferings to the greatest delights, purely to obey God's behest? . . . Alas! we are constrained to own that we are far removed from this degree of perfection; and yet this disposition of soul is inseparable from charity. Do we resemble a corpse which allows itself to be clothed or despoiled with equal indifference? a marble statue which is equally indifferent to honours and contempt? Are we indifferent to what contradicts or flatters our

[1] Job i. 21. [2] 1 Kings iii. 18.

sensuality? Does our indifference also extend to whatever place or office may be assigned to us? In proportion as we are deficient in this indifference, in so far are we removed from the perfection of love. In order to correct this defect let us frequently repeat with Saul, and with equally zealous sentiments: 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?'[1] And the moment we shall recognise the Divine Will let us cry out with David: 'My heart is ready, Lord, my heart is ready.'[2] O Sovereign Creator of the world, 'who hath poised the bulk of the earth with three fingers,'[3] and who, by Thy wisdom, goodness, and power, governest without difficulty this vast universe with all the beings that inhabit it, I abandon myself completely to the guidance of Thy Divine Will: 'as clay in the hands of the potter, so do I desire to be in Thy hands.'[4] In presence of the whole Court of heaven I consent with St. Ignatius, 'to deprive myself of my liberty, to bind myself to Thy Will, in order to follow Thee; I protest that I will wish nothing but what I shall know that Thou wishest. Do with me according to Thy wisdom and Thy goodness, for I know that Thou lovest me. Only grant me Thy love that I also may love Thee: by this gift Thou wilt give me all things.'

4. The fourth characteristic of true love consists in operation, that is to say, in that generous disposition which leads us to do great things and suffer much for Him whom we love. 'The proof of love,' says St. Gregory, 'is not so much in the affection of the soul as in attention to the practice of good.' St. Bernard thus expresses the same thought: 'Thou truly lovest God if thou dost all that thou canst for love of Him;' and he

[1] Acts ix. 3. [2] Ps. cvii. 2. [3] Isaias xl. 12. [4] Jerem. xviii. 6.

immediately gives the reason of this doctrine: 'Love, if it is genuine, operates great things; and if it is not operative, it is not love. Thus in the Sacred Canticle,' resumes the same saint, 'Jesus Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom, says to the soul, His Spouse, "place Me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm." He not only wishes to be placed upon the heart but also on the arm; because, if the heart is the seat of the affections, the arm is the instrument of works. Behold why it is that the Beloved wishes to be placed as a seal not only on the heart but likewise on the arm of the Spouse; because it is particularly by works that the holy soul manifests its love for God.' Whence we may conclude that the accomplishment of great things for God is an infallible mark that we love Him; for, 'he who is not willing to suffer all things, and abandon himself completely to the Will of his Beloved, does not deserve to have it said that he loves Him. He that loves must joyfully embrace, for the sake of his Beloved, all that is hardest and most bitter, and no afflictions must be able to detach him from Him.'[1] Whoever acts otherwise is not yet strong and prudent in his love.

Let us examine ourselves. Do we correspond faithfully with the holy interior inspirations which incite us to such or such an action? Do we eagerly embrace every opportunity of performing some great thing for the promotion of the glory of God and the salvation of our neighbour? Can we testify to ourselves that, during the course of our life, we have performed generously, or borne patiently, something that may entitle us to a well-founded hope that we shall obtain the gift of perseverance?

[1] Imit. b. iii. ch. 5.

Let us endeavour to find out what heroic action God demands of us by His reiterated solicitations. He remains at the door of our heart and knocks; to continue deaf to His importunities would be a proof of the absence of His love in our soul. Lord Jesus, who art 'come to bring fire upon earth, and who desirest nothing but that it be enkindled,'[1] take from me this 'heart of stone' which has till now resisted Thy love, 'and give me a heart of flesh'[2] susceptible of divine impressions and docile to Thy holy will. Enkindle in me 'the fire' of divine charity which never 'says it is enough,'[3] but which incessantly tends to ascend higher. Grant that my soul, inflamed with this sacred fire, may confidently attempt the most generous efforts, and that it may prove the sincerity of its love for its heavenly Spouse by operating great things for Him.

2. *The characteristics of self-love.*

In vain should we endeavour to discover and even acquire the marks of divine love, unless we generously and perseveringly combat our self-love. This unhappy vice is the rival, adversary, and sworn foe of the love of God. The one cannot triumph without causing the downfall of the other, neither can it be victorious without the other being vanquished: it reduces it to servitude in order to gain the ascendancy. 'For,' says St. Augustine, 'it is only by self-hatred that the soul advances in the love of God. We love God, therefore, in proportion as we hate ourselves, and divine love cannot enter our heart unless self-love be banished thence.

The reason is evident: for it is abuse of grace, tepidity, and above all mortal sin, that oppose, weaken, and com-

[1] Luke xii. 49. [2] Ezech. xi. 19. [3] Prov. xxx. 17.

pletely extinguish divine charity. Now self-love is the great obstacle to grace, the ruin of fervour, the origin of our sins, the source of all the evils of our soul, the nutriment of all the vices which pervade the universe; it is the chief of our bad passions, the principal foundation and stay of all our crimes. It is the most bitter opponent of God, whom it robs of the affections which are His due, and the most dangerous and formidable enemy of man, whose ruin it causes; a crafty, skilful, obstinate, and indomitable enemy which may be weakened but never entirely destroyed; a domestic enemy which enthrones itself in our heart, which identifies itself in some sort with our nature, which we carry about us without our being able to divest ourselves of it; which knows how to dazzle our mind by its illusions, and to deceive our will by its flatteries; which, uniting its efforts with those of Satan, contrives to keep up a secret understanding with our senses and our flesh in order to subject our soul. What a misfortune, therefore, have we not to apprehend should it succeed in enslaving us! Consequently, how true is this beautiful saying of St. Augustine: 'As all the welfare of man consists in loving God, so all the evil of man consists in loving himself!' 'And,' adds this saint, 'we should dread above all things this pernicious vice whence such great evils flow.'

It is, then, most important to indicate its distinctive characteristics, and the more so that it frequently assumes the mask of virtue to conceal its deformity. Now, as the avoidance of sin, purity of intention, conformity of our will with that of God, and the accomplishment of great things for Him, are the four chief characteristics and the natural consequences of divine

love, so in like manner relapses into sin, caused by blindness of mind; a vitiated intention produced by an inordinate desire of the honours and pleasures of life, the revolt of our free will against the Will of God, and in fine, the apathy and cowardice in doing good which arise from the fear of the difficulties we should have to overcome in the road to virtue, are at once the certain indications and sad results of self-love.

The *first* characteristic of self-love consists in blindness of mind, which is the source of an infinite number of faults. This the great apostle St. Paul teaches us. Writing to his disciple, Timothy, he predicts to him that 'men shall come, lovers of themselves,' then he enumerates the multitude of iniquities which shall be the fruit of this self-love: 'these men,' says he, 'shall be covetous, haughty, slanderers, ungrateful, blasphemers, without peace, incontinent, unmerciful.'[1] Now, as the apostle, by these introductory words 'men shall come, lovers of themselves,' shows us that self-love is the only source of all these sins, it follows that a soul by the mere fact of its being tainted by this spiritual disease is at the same time the victim and slave of numberless other vices.

St. Thomas positively certifies to this doctrine when he says: 'it cannot be doubted that inordinate self-love is the cause of all other sins.'[2] What do I say? This unhappy vice is itself the universal iniquity, because all other sins proceed from it, as streams flow from their source, and there is no prevarication of which it is not the principle. Therefore, whoever fosters this infernal monster in his bosom, is the receptacle of all sins; not always, it is true, realised by acts, but at least con-

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 2. [2] 1. 2, q. 77, a. 4.

tained in this as in their germ, and susceptible of developing themselves. We do not commit them all, but they all menace us incessantly as a tempest ready to burst upon our soul.

Self-love, this evil which resides in the innermost depths of our being, multiplies the strength of our evil inclinations; it is, as it were, the partisan of the devil, it permits everything to the senses, it acts in connivance with the flesh. No; it cannot be denied that it is the mainspring of all our vices.

The learned Pontiff, St. Gregory the Great, explains this by saying that 'self-love casts a thick veil over the eye of our heart, which it obscures. Thus deprived of the true light, we precipitate ourselves into all kinds of evils without perceiving the abyss into which we fall.' We follow blindly the perilous path on which we have entered; in our imprudent course, we incessantly strike our foot against some rock of scandal and are guilty of innumerable faults.

This blindness of mind, which is the fruit of self-love, produces, according to Tertullian, two deplorable effects, 1, we do not see what we are; 2, we believe ourselves to be what we are not.

In the first place worshippers of self, we do not see ourselves as we are; we do not see the errors which mislead us, the passions which inflame us, the number and enormity of the faults with which our soul is stained: our vices themselves we name virtues. In the second place we believe ourselves to be what we are not: we complacently esteem ourselves as altogether different from what we are; we flatter ourselves that we are conspicuous for qualities of which we are absolutely destitute; that we are rich in merits which we have not

really acquired, that we possess an ability and tact of which we are utterly devoid. In a word, we do not perceive in ourselves the stains which dishonour us, while, on the contrary, we observe gifts and advantages of which we do not even possess the shadow, and which, nevertheless, we imagine entitle us to the highest esteem and respect.

If by a similar illusion of mind, we are of the number of those men so well characterised by St. Paul, who are enemies of 'peace, without kindness, unmerciful, stubborn, puffed-up lovers of pleasure,'[1] addicted to different other vices, let us acknowledge that we love ourselves inordinately, that the blindness to which we are subjected, and which is the cause of so many evil inclinations, is also the fruit and indicator of self-love in our soul: let us seek a remedy for this evil by applying to ourselves these memorable words of the Gospel: 'He who loves his soul shall lose it, and he who hates his life in this world shall find life everlasting;'[2] 'he who hates not his own life cannot be my disciple.'[3] A *second* characteristic of self-love is that it vitiates our intention. This disorder which turns us away from our last end arises from an innate desire of honour and of sensual gratification. As self-love seeks the pomp of renown and the gratification of the flesh in all things, it necessarily injures the purity of our intention, impedes our spiritual progress, and scars and blights the beautiful flower of charity. This baneful vice, like the 'great dragon' of the Apocalypse, whose 'tail' dragged 'the third part of the stars of heaven into the abyss,'[4] infects the greater part of our actions with the corruption of its venom and empoisons the principle of their merit. Like Lucifer, this

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 3. [2] John xii. 25. [3] Luke xiv. 26. [4] Apoc. xiv. 4.

haughty passion ambitions the 'equalling itself to the Most High.'[1] It possesses an inconceivable dexterity in seeking itself in all things and in constituting itself the last end of all its actions. No less than God 'who has made all things for Himself,'[2] who proposes to Himself His own pleasure and glory in all His works, it also has but self in view, it seeks only its own glory and advantage everywhere. Imitating the impiety of Nabuchodonosor, who caused a statue to be erected in order to be adored by the Babylonians, self-love elevates itself as an odious idol; it exacts that all men bend the knee before it, that they erect an altar to it in the midst of their heart, bearing this infamous inscription: '*All for me.*' The desire of honour and that of sensual enjoyments are the two poles on which this perfidious domestic enemy would have all our actions revolve, and towards which it directs our intention. Thus these two kinds of concupiscence reveal the presence of self-love within us, just as smoke is the indication of fire. But as this dangerous adversary always acts with infinite craft and dissimulation, we need a very clear-sighted and experienced eye to discern all the subtlety of its wiles.

Behold some of the distinctive features by which we may recognise it. When we perform either in public or only in presence of a few, some good which we would have omitted had we been alone or unseen by men; when we apply ourselves more willingly to acts of our own choice than to those prescribed by our rule, or commanded by our superiors, and when we accomplish these last with indifference, reluctance, or sloth, or else apply ourselves to them only in proportion as we have something to hope

[1] Isaias xiv. 14. [2] Prov. xvi. 4.

or fear; the acting, on the contrary, with negligence, if not stimulated by either of these two motives; when we yield to an anxious solicitude in our enterprises; when in fine, we exult too much in our success and are too much dejected by our mistakes and failures, in this case we may be convinced that self-love is the actuating principle of our life: such dispositions are the certain marks of its presence, and so many effects of its malice. Do we desire that our intention may never be vitiated and spoiled, but that, always pure and upright, it may ascend from the 'desert' of this life to the throne of God, 'as a pillar of smoke, exhaling myrrh and incense,'[1] let us frequently examine the principle and end of our actions, let us weigh them in the scales of the sanctuary: let us not allow ourselves to be deceived by their mere appearance, let us entertain a prudent distrust of them all, let us strictly investigate even the most secret emotions of our soul. Let us know how to profit by this admonition of St. Magdalen de Pazzi, that 'self-love has two eyes, the one to covet honours and the esteem of men, and the other the satisfaction of the senses. If we succeed in plucking them both out, we shall have little to fear from this odious vice and the vitiated intention which is the effect and sign of it.' 'We shall even win a complete victory,' says a pious author, 'and we shall be actuated by a pure intention in all our works, if we are humble and mortified.'

The *third* characteristic of self-love is the opposition of our will to that of God. Too often our criminal will, yielding to the solicitations of its depraved appetites, wishes only for what can flatter its sensual affections and rejects what can mortify them; it delivers itself up with-

[1] Cant. iii. 6.

out restraint to all the disorder of its desires. Become the wretched tool of self-love, it accepts with ardour all that it presents to it, it is tyrannized over by it, it does what it wishes, it omits all that displeases it, and as it is the counsellor and author of all the evils that happen it, becomes itself its accomplice in operating them. Let us prove it by some examples: The self-love which predominates over Lucifer inspires him with the criminal desire of equalling himself to the Most High, and immediately the will of this faithless archangel begins the revolt. Self-love flatters our first parents with the proud thought that they shall become as gods, and their vanquished will plucks the forbidden fruit. Delivered up to this same passion, Nabuchodonosor persuades himself that he is God, and on the instant his will urges him to cause himself to be adored. Let God intimate this command to our soul: 'Lust shall be under thee, and thou shalt have dominion over it;'[1] let Jesus Christ propose His example: 'Learn of me that I am meek and humble of heart;'[2] so perfect a doctrine displeases our domestic enemy, which the will, impatient of bearing the yoke of God, and burning with a desire of resisting His orders, applauds. Thus it is that our will is the auxiliary and faithful minister of self-love: it is the bad fruit of a bad tree, and the mark by which we may recognise its accursed nature.

Let us bemoan the opposition and rebellion which we see between the human will and that of God; 'thinking itself free like the wild ass's colt,'[3] it dares in its pride to ask with Pharao: 'who is the Lord that I should hearken to His voice? I know not the Lord:'[4] 'I will

[1] Gen. iv. 7. [2] Matt. xi. 29. [3] Job xi. 12. [4] Exod. v. 2.

not become the slave of any one;'[1] 'I will not serve.'[2] Is it astonishing, then, that the exasperated justice of God should clothe itself in the armour of the strong, 'sharpen its terrible wrath as a lance,'[3] and let loose the tempest of its rage against this single foe, and that it should condemn and punish but this vice alone; I say this vice alone, because when the sovereign avenger of crime 'chained the rebel angels and precipitated them from heaven into the abyss to be tormented;'[4] when, in the time of Noe, 'He caused it to rain upon the earth for forty days and forty nights, and destroyed all that was on the earth, from man even to the beast,'[5] when, in fine, He 'cast Pharao's chariots and army into the sea,'[6] and at His command, 'the earth opened to swallow up Dathan and Abiron;'[7] when, I repeat, the inexorable justice of God electrified the world by these tremendous chastisements, what else did it wish to punish, asks St. Bernard, if not self-will? 'Let' man's 'will cease to sin, and God will no longer manifest His vengeance; let it expire, and there shall be no longer hell. For against what shall the everlasting fire exercise its fury, if not against self-will? And even here below, when we endure cold, hunger, or any other suffering, what is affected except our self-will?'[8]

Since it is the chief or rather the only end of the avenging arrows of Divine Justice, we cannot but believe that God sovereignly abhors it. Another great evil of self-love, and one well calculated to make us understand its perniciousness, is that it despoils us of all our merits, and, by a deplorable metamorphosis, changes good into evil, pure gold into vile dross. Let

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 12. [2] Jerem. ii. 20. [3] Wisd. v. 21. [4] 2 Pet. ii. 4.
[5] Gen. vii. 4, 23. [6] Exod. xv. 4. [7] Numb. xvi. 32. [8] Serm. on Ascen.

us then conceive a deep horror of this dangerous vice, and studiously examine whether it has not taken up its abode in our soul. For it is a monster cunning as it is cruel, which, by artifice and disguise, contrives to penetrate even into the sanctuary. 'Do we not follow our own will even in our fasts?'[1] Do we not confide overmuch in our own judgment, and are we not too tenacious of our own opinion? Do we faithfully follow the wise advice of a pious author, to prefer the opinion of others to our own? Do we yield a blind and prompt obedience to our superiors in all things? or, on the contrary, do we not listen too readily to the murmurs of our self-will? Did we thoroughly understand its nature, we would not entertain so absorbing an affection for it. 'Our will,' says St. Prosper, 'vitiated by the prevarication of the first man, is volatile, uncertain, inexperienced, weak in action, blind in its passions, arrogant in honour, wholly preoccupied with the business of which it treats; it is restless and suspicious, esteems glory more than virtue, is more solicitous for its reputation than for its instruction.'[2] And we would refuse to make the sacrifice of this rebellious, disorderly, criminal will to the love of God! it would appear to us too painful to attach it as a trophy to the foot of that Cross on which the Man-God, renouncing His own will for love of us, 'became obedient even unto death.'[3]

Ah, let us beware of so shameful a weakness! but let these words of Jesus Christ: 'Father, let Thy will, not mine, be done;'[4] 'he who does the will of my Father, he is my brother, and my sister, and my

[1] Isaias lviii. 3.
[2] Book I. of Vocat. of Gentiles.
[3] Philip. ii. 8.
[4] Luke xxii. 42.

mother;'[1] excite and stimulate us to associate ourselves to those true faithful of whom St. Augustine says, that 'they conform their will to the will of God, and endeavour to follow the Divine Will and not their own.'[2] Let us hearken to the advice of St. Bernard: 'Let us fly self-will and we shall be detached from all things, for it is a vampire which attracts everything to itself: let us cast it from us and we shall have rid ourselves of a yoke which presses upon us incessantly.'[3] Thus it is that we shall destroy the third characteristic of self-love, which consists in the opposition of our will to the will of God.

The *fourth* feature of self-love is a cowardice and an indifference for good which arise from the apprehension of the difficulties we should have to surmount in the way of virtue. These two words: *forbear, bear—forbear* from all that flatters the senses, *bear* all that mortifies them—are the device, the war-cry which sustains us in the spiritual combat. To do and to suffer; to do good, to suffer evil, behold the buckler of a soldier of Jesus Christ. To conquer self, to renounce all things, to carry one's cross, such are the language and practice of the disciples of Eternal Truth.

But to self-love such maxims appear harsh, arbitrary, impracticable, impossible. It knows, it feels that they apply the axe to the root of the tree, that they plunge the sword into the innermost depths of its being, that they threaten it with utter annihilation. It is terrified, it trembles, it is seized with horror, and dreading the violence it should have to undergo, it insinuates a spirit of languor and diffidence as deep as possible into the heart. If the will, incited by the urgent solicitations of

[1] Matt. xii. 50. [2] Manual. [3] Serm. on Cant.

grace, sometimes essays to enter the path of virtue, self-love shudderingly cries out to it: 'The lion is in the way, the lioness occupies the avenues.'[1] At this cry all the senses are thrown into a panic, all the movements of the soul tend to resist the heavenly inspiration. The explanation of these disastrous results is as follows: that horror of humiliation and mortification which then makes itself felt, that antipathy for spiritual exercises and that discouragement under difficulties, are the pernicious fruits of self-love; by them we may recognise the presence of this insidious serpent, though it seeks to glide furtively into the most secret windings of our heart. The most effectual remedy against so great an evil is, the moment we perceive ourselves attacked by it, to take a firm resolution to wage an undying war against it, to aspire to the pinnacle of perfection despite the efforts of its fury. For, whatever self-love may assert to the contrary, solid virtue 'is neither above us nor far off from us' that we may excuse ourselves, saying: 'which of us can cross the sea?' but, on the contrary, 'this commandment is very nigh to us;'[2] all the means of practising it are at our disposal; we have the time for it, the opportunity is favourable, and grace urges us. It only remains for us to 'put our hand' courageously 'to the plough' and not 'to look back;'[3] in other words, not to allow ourselves to be deceived by self-love, of which this indifference and this sloth in well-doing are but too evident marks.

When these four characteristics, which we have just described, unite in a soul, it is easy to perceive the presence of self-love there; but this pernicious disease is also productive of many other baneful effects which

[1] Prov. xxvi. 13. [2] Deut. xxx. 11—14. [3] Luke ix. 62.

serve to reveal its intrinsic nature and malice, I will even say its passion to injure us.

A distinctive mark of self-love is not only to love self, but to love self alone; to love self without end or measure, to desire that honours, riches, and pleasures concentrate on self, to regret when others obtain them, to regard self as the centre of everything, to refer all to self as to another divinity, to wish, like fire, to transmute all into itself, and, like air, to penetrate everywhere, to aspire to rule over all and in all things. But since self-love, the moment it manifests itself in us, can but excite the hatred, or at least the contempt, of our fellow-creatures (for in proportion as we foster it in our hearts, in so much do others detest and abhor it there); since, I say, this artful Proteus knows that it can never obtain what it desires if it allows itself to be detected, it assumes the mask of abnegation, it ceases to be itself, and always presents itself under a different aspect. Were we to credit it, it is anything but self-love. To conceal itself the more effectually, it disguises itself under the mask of virtue, assumes the mantle of probity, adorns itself with the appearance of affability. Its levity is politeness, its anger a just reprimand, its craving for fame zeal for the glory of God; its ambition to command is love for the public welfare; its unsocial disposition an attraction for solitude, its adulations and servile officiousness are a prudent precaution for the future, and the legitimate testimony of the respect due to others.

It is almost inconceivable how far the artifices of this crafty serpent extend. Though it is the author of all misfortunes, its guilt is always indiscernible; it has a thousand ways of justifying itself, a thousand interstices through which to insinuate itself. Its deceits are as

dexterously concealed as they are continual; we can neither imagine nor express all its activity and subtlety; it is an abyss of darkness which we cannot fathom; it is a perfect labyrinth; if you discover an opening into it a thousand paths present themselves and, at the first step, cast you back into uncertainty. The preservation of our health, the glory of God, the care of our reputation, are so many defensive weapons of self-love to repulse the efforts of grace.

It even simulates holy operations with so much skill, that it persuades us we are only obeying the divine inspirations, when we are but the dupes of its treachery. Not content with such perfidious cruelty, it renders all our virtues null and void by proposing to us either human glory or the gratification of the senses as their recompense, or else by attributing to piety what is but the effect of our temperament and natural disposition. Very often it even causes us to avoid one passion only in order to gratify another. Thus, if it inspires us to combat gluttony, licentiousness, avarice, it is with the arms of pride with which it takes care to invest us; so that we practise virtue only with a view to our reputation, which would be compromised by the opposite vices.

Self-love, above all, wages an implacable war on divine love, endeavouring incessantly to annihilate its heroic efforts. This beautiful virtue neglects nothing to detach man from self, that it may unite him to God: 'I am come,' it says, 'not to bring peace on earth, but division,'[1] the separation of man from itself. Self-love, on the contrary, through very different motives, strives incessantly to separate man from God, and to attach him to himself and creatures. Alas! it is the ferocious

[1] Luke xii. 51.

enemy which attacks Christianity with the most success, which overthrows its foundations, the principal basis of which is a holy hatred of self; for Jesus Christ has declared that no one shall ever be reckoned amongst His disciples, save on the condition of changing self-love into self-hatred.

Not only the inordinate lover of self cannot be a disciple of Jesus Christ, but he cannot even be a virtuous man or a good citizen: for to possess these two qualities it is necessary to live according to justice. Now justice, whose attribute is to render to each one what is his due, cannot subsist with this propensity to refer all to one's self; reason and equity demand that the virtuous and upright man shall never do anything capable of offending his fellow creature, or seek his own interest to the detriment of others: it also exacts of a good citizen that he prefer the public good to his own advantage. Self-love subverts all these laws; whether its conduct give pain to others, injure its neighbour, be useful or prejudicial, pleasing or displeasing to others, never costs it a thought. It makes no account of the interests of the state, or of the advantage of individuals, it is solely occupied about self; its own glory and pleasure engross all its thoughts. Let others suffer provided I be well, that is their affair; I only concern myself about myself and my own interests. It is certain, therefore, that the slave of self-love can neither be a true servant of God nor a disciple of Jesus Christ, nor a virtuous man, nor even a good citizen, and that this vice is the most dangerous enemy of our salvation. It is also the most universal: it attacks us in all states, in all circumstances, and in all the stages of our existence; it is ubiquitous—everything, even nothingness

itself, serves it as nutriment. If it is vanquished, if we flatter ourselves that it is destroyed, it survives its own ruin; it ignores the decrepitude of old age: years but add new strength to its power; it commands the young with passion and vehemence; it holds the old captive beneath its tyranny. The saints themselves groan under its cruel yoke, and invoke death against the rage of this potent foe. As they are not ignorant that they shall have to dread its pursuits so long as their soul shall be detained in the prison of the body, their most ardent desires are to be delivered from it.

But since self-love is the empoisoned source whence all other vices flow upon the world as from a torrent; since it is the soul and the head of all the evil passions which assemble under its rebellious flag to combat against God, against Jesus Christ and the holy laws of His morality; since it is the ruin of grace, the destruction of virtue, the tomb of our merits; since, in fine, it contrives by its artful subtlety to glide in everywhere and to insinuate its deadly venom into our holiest actions, what more can be wanting to inspire us with an eternal hatred of this implacable adversary? What! we find it impossible to abhor this, our most ruthless, most relentless enemy? an enemy which caresses in order to wound us, which fawns upon us in order to insinuate into us its deadly poison, which kills whilst embracing us! Blind that we are! we are unable to hate this traitor which, under the guise of friendship, dogs our steps, seats itself at our table, and watches near our pillow; but whose treachery, combined with the flesh, the world, and the devil, continually lays snares for us? We are unable to detest a rapacious robber which has so often despoiled us of grace? a

tyrant which has so repeatedly cast us under the slavery of Satan? a parricide which, by its criminal caresses, has caused us to consent to nail anew Jesus Christ, our brother, to the cross? to inflict as many wounds on our heavenly Father as we have committed sins? Once more, is it so difficult to detest this plunderer, this despot, this parricide?

'Oh, earth, earth, earth! listen to the word of the Lord;' man formed of clay, who art oblivious of thy last end, and subjectest thyself to the degrading bondage of thy domestic enemy, listen to the word of the Lord, which cries out to thee: 'If any one wishes to follow Me, let him renounce himself;'[1] 'he who wishes to save his life shall lose it;'[2] 'he who hates not his own life cannot be My disciple;'[3] 'no one can serve two masters.'[4] No one can follow Jesus Christ and Belial, grace and nature, self-love and divine love: either must be renounced. Either my self-love must perish, or I must perish myself. One or the other must be given up. Its defeat or mine; its destruction or mine is inevitable. I confess this truth, and yet I still deliberate as to the resolution I should take!

Oh, heavens! we know that self-love precipitates us into the greatest evils; we know that it robs us of the principal and choicest part of the graces which were destined for us; and when we obey some holy inspiration, we feel that it strives to infect our works with the desire of vain glory and self-seeking; consequently to corrupt our best actions, to injure our acts of virtue; we are aware of all this, we admit it, we bewail it. And yet, far from entertaining for this perfidious foe the hatred that it merits, we encourage its treachery. Alas!

[1] Luke ix. 23. [2] Matt. xvi. 25. [3] Luke xiv. 26. [4] Matt. vi. 4.

it is because a blind self-love has fascinated our sight! Let us then, at length, form generous resolutions; and inflamed with a holy anger, let us, with St. Bernard, pronounce sentence of death against our enemy: 'Let God arise, let the flesh perish, let the enemy, man, be destroyed, this contemner of God, this lover of self, this friend of the world, this slave of the devil is guilty of death: let it be crucified.' In order that it may never revive, let us place the virtue of self-abnegation as a perpetual guardian at its tomb; this virtue will diffuse into our heart the salutary oil calculated to inflame the fire of hatred against this detestable monster. If not, it is all over with our perfection, never shall we attain to that solid virtue to which the love of God so powerfully encourages us, and which God exacts and merits from us under so many titles.

CHAPTER V.

OF THE HAPPINESS RESERVED IN HEAVEN FOR THE VIRTUOUS.

In the third chapter we have shown what peace and tranquillity virtuous souls enjoy during this life, and with what happiness they are inundated at death. But this is not the only reward granted to them, and the following consideration will teach us what felicity is reserved for them beyond the tomb. To the four first motives of labouring for our sanctification, which are faith, fear, hope, and charity, it is just to add the remembrance of the glory which is promised us in heaven, since 'all our labours become light and easy when we reflect

on the reward they merit for us, the hope of the recompense is at once an alleviation and an encouragement in our labours.'[1] Now I remark that the fate of the elect is infinitely happy on account of the plenitude of their happiness and of the certainty of the eternity of its duration.

Article I.

Of the plenitude of the happiness of the saints.

1. *This happiness is inexpressible.*

Blessed spirits! lend me your sentiments, inflame me with your ardour while I undertake to extol the plenitude of your happiness; and since it surpasses all human expression, assist me to speak at least less unworthily of that sublime glory with which you are invested, that glory which the profound genius of an Augustine presumed not to fathom, which Paul himself in his ecstasy attempted not to describe, because all our ideas and conceptions could not reach it, because 'all our words and all the efforts of our imagination are inferior to the beauty, the grace, the glory, the splendour and the majesty of the saints;' 'consequently,' adds St. Augustine, 'it is easier to express what heavenly felicity is not, than what it really is.'

The doctors of the Church have frequently endeavoured to portray the blessings of paradise to us under different figures, to give us at least some idea, however faint, of them. Thus, according to St. John Chrysostom, the famous banquet prepared by King Assuerus for the nobles of his kingdom, 'to manifest to them the splendour and riches of his empire, and the glory and extent

[1] St. Jerome, Lett. to Demetrius.

of his power,'[1] is an emblem of the happiness of heaven; for, in Scripture, the heavenly felicity is often expressed under the symbol of a royal banquet.

But all this earthly magnificence, all this exuberance of delights on which the oriental sovereigns prided themselves, is but a shadow of 'this great feast'[2] which the Monarch of the universe prepares for His saints in the eternal Tabernacles. He Himself, oh admirable condescension! He Himself and not one of the seraphim, not one of His angels, but Himself, the Sovereign Master, debased to the condition of servant, 'shall gird' the reins of the elect and 'shall make them sit down'[3] at His Table 'that they may rest from their labours.'[4] 'He will serve them,'[5] and will bring all the cares of divine Providence into requisition that they want for nothing.

The Beloved Disciple under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost has given us a much more accurate description of it and one more approaching the reality. He represents heaven to us under the symbol of a magnificent city. 'The walls thereof are of jasper stone, but the city itself pure gold, like to clear glass. The foundations of the city are of sapphire and emerald, adorned with all manner of precious stones, the twelve gates are twelve pearls, and the streets of the city are pure gold, as it were transparent glass, a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of the Lamb. In the midst of the street, and on both sides of the river is the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits and yielding its fruits every month. The glory of God,' a thousand times brighter than the sun, continually 'enlightens the city.'[6] Dispensing rich treasures of

[1] Esther i. 4. [2] Luke xiv. 16. [3] Ibid. xii. 57.
[4] Apoc. xiv. 13. [5] Luke xii. 37. [6] Apoc. xxi. 18, and xxii. 12.

light and felicity, it dispels darkness thence for ever. But this description is, nevertheless, but a faint image, an imperfect sketch far beneath the reality, and which the prophet has only proportioned to the weakness of our understanding. For nothing of these created objects really exists in heaven; everything there is incomparably more beautiful, more excellent, more magnificent: 'the eye hath not seen, the ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God prepares for those who love Him.'[1] There is nothing truer therefore than this thought of St. Augustine: 'What God has prepared for those who love Him cannot in its fulness either be perceived by faith, embraced by hope, or realised by charity: it is a good superior to our desires and wishes, a good which the soul may long for and acquire without being able to express what it is, or estimate what it is worth!'

Nor is this astonishing: the joys of heaven are infinite, and as there is no proportion between the finite and the infinite, it is impossible that this ocean of delights should be compressed within the narrow limits of the human mind.

The joys of heaven are infinite.

1. Because they deliver us from misfortunes, infinite in their number and their duration. In their number; for God can perpetually draw from His wrath, of which the angels are unable to fathom the abysses, new torments, and pour them on man at every moment; in their duration, since in hell the sinner shall be eternally tormented. Now, the happy condition of the saints preserves them for ever from all these evils. 'In heaven,'

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 9.

says St. Augustine, 'there shall be no more death, nor lassitude, nor infirmity, nor want, nor hunger, nor thirst, nor decay, nor anger, nor sadness, nor envy.'[1] And St. John assures us 'there shall be no mourning, nor weeping; God shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of the elect,'[2] 'and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.'[3] There shall be no disorder in the will, nor revolt in the passions, nor irregularity in the imagination, nor darkness in the understanding, nor tyranny in the senses. The cause of this happy state is, that in heaven there is neither a war between the flesh and the spirit, nor a rebellion of our will against reason, nor any revolt of the passions. In a word, sin, the fatal source of all the misfortunes which desolate the universe, has no place in this glorious abode, and consequently unhappiness is unknown there.

2. Because they procure for us infinite goods. After Boëtius, St. Thomas teaches that eternal beatitude is 'a perfect state' which combines 'all goods,'[4] at the same time. 'There it is,' adds St. Augustine, 'that the happy soul, desiring only the essential Good, possesses all it desires.'[5] It possesses God, the Infinite Good and the exhaustless source of all goods; and in possessing Him it enjoys an infinitude of goods and an unalloyed felicity. Behold the high and sublime idea we should conceive of the glory of the elect. Yes; their happiness is not only incomprehensible, but it is also infinite, because it preserves them from infinite evils and ensures to them infinite good.

Rejoice, then, and exult with gladness, thou who unfalteringly tendest to the practice of virtue, for thou

[1] Bk. iii. on Symb. [2] Apoc. xxi. 4. [3] Isaias li. 11.
[4] 1. 2, q. 3. [5] Bk. iii. of Trinity.

directest thy steps straight to heaven, where perfect unmingled joy shall be thy recompense. 'O heavenly Jerusalem!' mayest thou exclaim with the terrestrial angels, 'Oh, holy city of God! my heart loves thee, my soul pants after thy beauty;'[1] oh, 'why am I not already admitted into the choirs of heavenly intelligences, why am I not already united with these blessed spirits at the foot of the throne of God?'[2] 'Why must my exile be prolonged?'[3] 'Oh, who will give me the wings of the dove, that I may fly away and be at rest?'[4]

2. *It is communicated to the elect with a perfect plenitude.*

Jesus Christ Himself teaches us how full and perfect is the happiness of the elect, 'good measure and pressed down and shaken together and running over shall they give into your bosom.'[5] The eternal recompense, it is true, shall be meted and proportioned to our merits, but, nevertheless, 'the measure shall be full, pressed down, it shall run over.' 'It shall be,' says the holy abbot of Clairveaux, 'a measure without measure,' a measure which shall not only be founded on the labours and holy desires of the elect, but which shall equal in some sort the goodness and munificence of God.

God 'will' Himself 'be to our understanding a fulness of light, to our will a fulness of peace,' to our memory a fulness of consolation. 'God all truth, God all love,'[6] God the infinite Providence, will inundate us with these three kinds of goods; and from this triple fulness of light, of peace, and of consolation shall result to the saints a superabundance of felicity which shall

[1] St. Aug. Solil. [2] St. Greg. Hom. [3] Ps. cxix. 3.
[4] Ps. liv. 7. [5] Luke vi. 38. [6] Serm. on Cant.

fully satiate their souls in all their faculties, according to the promise of the Royal Prophet: 'I shall be satisfied when Thy glory appears.'[1]

1. I say that God, the infinite Providence, will diffuse the fulness of perfect consolation into the memory of the elect; they shall be permitted 'to enter' with their whole being 'into the powers of the Lord;' they shall be immersed in the boundless ocean of the Divinity; 'they shall no longer remember anything save His Justice,' to bless it because it will reward them according to their merits. Uninterruptedly contemplating the adorable Trinity in all its splendour, they shall recall with a lively gratitude that continuity of graces with which the divine tenderness encompassed them; they shall revolve in mind the admirable economy of their salvation, those different events by which the divine Providence has so marvellously conducted them; they shall recall the temptations, the dangers, and even the falls of which the Eternal Wisdom has made use to lead them back to the paths of virtue.

Who could express of what a source of unalloyed happiness, are such reminiscences to the souls of the saints? If the Patriarch Joseph experienced such sweet consolation in recalling to mind the years already elapsed, and that he had attained to the highest dignity of Egypt through the envy of his brothers, the credulity of Putiphar, the sufferings of a prison; what far more solid happiness shall the blessed soul experience in considering in the retrospect the sorrows, the tribulations, the poverty, and the indigence by which it acquired, with the assistance of God, and, almost without thinking of it, these delights, this glory, and these

[1] Ps. xvi. 15.

riches with which it is now satiated, in looking down from heaven and in happy security on those perilous rocks so notorious for shipwreck, and which it has fortunately escaped, despite the tempests of the world's stormy sea?

Oh! with what rapture shall this sole thought fill it: I might have been damned; I might have forfeited the happiness I now enjoy! What danger did I not incur in such a year, in such a place, with such a person! Oh! had I indulged that pleasure, I might have slumbered in tepidity; had I resisted that inspiration, I should not have acquired solid virtue; had a sudden death, oh, fearful thought! surprised me at such a period, alas! I should have perished irretrievably; deprived for ever of heaven, 'I should now dwell in devouring flames, with everlasting burnings.'[1] But, oh, thanks to my God! I have resisted, I have vanquished, I have reached the happy term! I am now happy, and I shall be so eternally. Oh, felicity . . . what a plenitude of joy we taste in Thee! Is it surprising, Lord, that the elect, remembering how good and faithful Thou wert to them during life, 'should publish the memory of the abundance of Thy sweetness?'[2]

2. God, Truth itself, shall impart equal happiness to the understanding by the light which He shall infuse into it; for in heaven our mind shall behold no longer in the distance, as 'in a mirror and an enigma, but close, face to face,'[3] with a clear, intuitive view, the perfect beauty of the Divine Essence. It shall contemplate without a cloud the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity and the immensity of its perfections; the veil shall be withdrawn, and the soul, flooded with the purest lights, shall behold

[1] Isaias xxxiii. 14. [2] Ps. cxiv. 7. [3] 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

with rapture the incomprehensible treasures contained in the person of Jesus Christ; it shall penetrate all the secrets of the Divinity. 'The happy soul,' says the holy Patriarch of Venice, 'vivified by the word of God, united to Him by a clear vision, shall know intuitively in this source all the secrets of God. It shall see God in Himself, God in it, and it in God. It shall see all creatures in God, and God in all creatures: an ineffable and enchanting light shall illumine its gaze.'[1]

What sweetness, what delight, what ineffable enjoyment will this fulness of light produce in it! For such is the infinite beauty of God, that were He to allow Himself to be seen by the damned during a space not exceeding the duration of a flash of lightning, all those wretched beings would forget the hatred they bear to their Creator, and instantaneously impelled by a gentle violence, they would conceive for Him a boundless love. They would willingly consent to endure a thousand hells, were it given them to behold this increated Beauty for the twinkling of an eye. The saints in heaven would themselves a thousand times prefer to suffer all that the reprobates endure rather than lose one of those glances with which they incessantly behold the divine Essence, so entrancing, admirable, and perfect is the beauty of this sovereign Majesty! Oh, my soul! the clear vision, the distinct view of this ineffable Beauty, of these inexpressible charms, shall be 'the portion of our inheritance,'[2] the principle of our eternal beatitude.

Let us take courage, then, we who are born for heaven! Let us rejoice in anticipation, for we have all reason to do so, since we are all destined 'to see God as He is.'[3] It is the Beloved Disciple who promises and guarantees

[1] Treatise on Charity. [2] Ps. xv. 5. [3] 1 John iii. 2.

it to us. 'Listen then, all you who fear God,'[1] and give free scope to your hopes: you shall behold this infinite Power, Fidelity, Wisdom, Justice, Goodness, inexhaustible Mercy, this Immutability, Providence, Eternity, such as He is, and in Him you shall behold all things. For, says St. Gregory, 'what shall they not see who shall behold Him who sees all!' We shall see Him, I say, most perfectly. According to the great Bishop of Hippo, 'we shall possess in ourselves without labour and without even the shadow of error, the knowledge of all things, because we shall inebriate ourselves in their proper source with the waters of the Wisdom of God.'[2]

Oh, blissful abode! oh, source of purest delights! 'How lovely are Thy Tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord,'[3] by the ardour of its desires. 'Oh, joy above all joy!' does it exclaim with St. Augustine, 'when shall I be admitted into thee, that I may see my God in His Glory, such as He is? When shall that day of joy and jubilation arrive when I shall enter into the house of God and satiate my desires by beholding Him face to face who beholds me?'[4]

O sanctity! who can live without loving and desiring thee? since thou art the mysterious ladder which enables us to ascend by the practice of the theological and moral virtues, as by so many steps, to the perfect light of which God, the Infinite Truth, is the source!

3. Not only shall we see God as He is, but we shall love Him; we shall love Him with all our strength, without any diminution. From this sentiment of love a plenitude of peace will flow into our will, diffused there by Him who is charity itself. For this intuitive vision

[1] Ps. lxv. 16. [2] City of God. [3] Ps. lxxxiii. 5. [4] St. Aug. Solil.

will not resemble those imperfect lights by which we know God on earth, without being thereby impelled to love Him. This knowledge will be active, it will make us taste what we shall feel, love what we shall see; it will inflame us with a burning ardour, and, by an enchanting violence, it will transport us into the bosom of our Beloved.

Thus, not only shall the understanding see clearly this infinite Beauty and Amiability, which is the source of all beauty, and the happy term of all affections, but the will shall love Him with the most ardent love. This sight and this love will produce in the soul an unspeakable joy; for what happiness for the heart to love so amiable a Good, and to love Him so perfectly; to attain, by the understanding and the will, to this centre of all glory and of all beatitude; to be intimately united to Him by the bond of charity; to possess Him absolutely and entirely, and to be like iron in a furnace, completely transformed into this divine fire!

Could we only aspire to the measure of felicity which is due to the angels by the condition of their nature, this would of itself be a great favour; what is it, then, to have a right to the happiness which Jesus Christ Himself enjoys? What do I say, to the happiness of Jesus Christ? We are destined, we worms of the earth—O heavens! be astonished and adore the incomprehensible prodigality of the Divine Goodness!—we are destined to share in the very felicity of the most Holy Trinity itself! Yes; really and in its own substance, the riches, the majesty, the joy with which the Creator is rich, great and happy, shall also be our riches, our dignity, and our joy.

Oh, word full of inexpressible consolation! Thou shalt be, O my God, Thou shalt be our beatitude, our sufficiency, our property! Yes, we shall be happy in heaven with

the happiness with which God is happy, though in a different degree. The same essential good which from all eternity has been the food and life of this Being of beings, shall also be the principle of our perfect contentment. That truth, that goodness, which inebriates the divine nature, shall likewise inebriate our soul. Our understanding shall receive no other lights, our will shall experience no other wishes, our heart shall possess no other ardours than those of God: His bosom shall be our throne, His crown our diadem, His glory our vesture, His immensity our riches, His wisdom our knowledge, His will our wish, and His power our strength. We shall be seated on His throne, we shall eat at His table, we shall reign in His kingdom which He 'has prepared' for us 'from the beginning of the world.'[1]

'Answer now, O mortals,' says St. Bernard, 'what is happier than this beatitude?—more enchanting than this felicity?—more enviable than such a fate?—more sweet than to live with God, and to live of God, than to be with God and in God, who shall be all to us in all things?'[2] What more perfect plenitude of consolation, of light, and of peace can we desire than that which God, infinite Providence; God, essential Truth; God, all Love, diffuses, preserves, and augments without measure in the memory, the understanding, and the will of the elect? Oh, ineffable satiety! whoever hears thee spoken of without longing after his heavenly country is more irrational than the brute, more insensible than the rock!

'O Fountain of Life! O source of living waters!' shall I exclaim with St. Augustine; 'when shall I quit this desert, uncultivated, sterile earth, in order to behold

[1] Matt. xxv. 34. [2] Serm. on Ascen.

Thy glory and Thy power, and to quench my thirst in the copious waters of Thy mercy ?'[1] O happy moment! wherein I shall be admitted to a happiness insomuch the more perfect and incomparable, as it is more incomprehensible, more complete, in a word, infinite. O yearned-for moment! wherein I shall delightfully repose in Thee, my God, and Thou in me in the sweet embraces of a mutual love. O amiable path of virtue which leads me to such happiness! who would not be anxious to enter thee to win so abundant a recompense ?—a recompense which is increased instead of being diminished, as the number is increased of those who are called to participate in it.

4. For, as St. Augustine observes, 'the inheritance of Jesus Christ, of which we are all coheirs, is not diminished by the number of those who possess it; and the number of those who participate in it does not lessen the portion of each: this inheritance is as abundant for a great multitude as for a small number, and it can be as fully possessed by each one as by all.'[2] Elsewhere the holy doctor resumes this thought: 'The kingdom of God,' says he, 'is possessed in its entirety equally by all and by each one. The kingdom is not diminished by the number of those who share in it, because it is invisible. It preserves its integrity for each one of the elect because all possess it conjointly with each other.'

Besides, this society and innumerable multitude of the elect, far from diminishing their joy, increases the abundance of their delight a hundred-fold. For, according to the thought of St. Augustine, there shall be as many additional joys in heaven as there shall be saints, as many blessed eternities as there are friends of God, since

[1] St. Aug. Solil. [2] On Ps. xlix.

each of the saints shall shine with an admirable beauty, each one shall also possess as much of paradise as he can contemplate companions of his glory.

This superabundance of delights shall not even experience any diminution from the fact that the saints shall be placed in different degrees of glory. For although 'one shall have the glory of the sun, another the glory of the moon, and another the glory of the stars; although star differeth from star in glory,'[1] still, St. Augustine assures us, 'this difference of glory shall not excite jealousy, because union and charity shall reign over all wills.' All the saints, according to the comparison of the apostle, shall be cemented together as the living stones of the same edifice, supported one upon the other, all resting on the same foundation, and forming collectively that magnificent Temple in which 'the sacrifice of praise' is perpetually offered to the divine Majesty. Each one shall be perfectly content with his lot. There shall be no opposition of desires, thoughts, advice, or will amongst them. There shall be neither enmities nor suspicions; they shall all live happy, animated by the same spirit; and, notwithstanding their multitude and the difference of their glory, all shall enjoy the plenitude of happiness.

Oh, heavens! who shall be able on earth to comprehend the inexpressible sweetness with which the elect shall be satiated in heaven?—not only shall they possess all they desire, but beyond it, so that nothing more shall remain for them to wish for. Their heart shall be full, their mind satisfied, their soul satiated; and yet 'this satiety,' says St. Gregory, 'shall leave a holy avidity, and the avidity shall produce satiety.' 'They shall be

[1] Homil. on Gospel.

always replenished with delights,' adds St. Augustine, 'and always desirous;' because 'the desire is not a painful privation, and the abundance does not induce disgust.'[1]

God will not present them the delicious wine of heavenly pleasures drop by drop, but 'He will steep them in a torrent of delights.' Not only shall they be satiated, but 'they shall be inebriated with the plenty of God's House.'[2] The joy of the Lord shall not enter into their heart, because the space is too narrow, it would be compressed there; but they 'shall enter' themselves 'into the joy of the Lord.'[3] Their whole being shall be submerged in this ocean of all delights; God will miraculously dilate the hearts of His servants, in order that they may have sufficient capacity to receive the plenitude of the divine joys. Their beatitude shall be so full and perfect that the infinite wisdom of God knows no felicity greater as to its essence, and His Omnipotence cannot grant us a happiness preferable to that which He confers on His elect in giving them Himself: 'I shall Myself be thy reward.'[4] God exhausts, so to speak, all the treasures of the Divinity to render us perfectly and eternally happy; perfectly and eternally! O rapturous words! you are the two poles on which all the glory of the saints revolves. David styles the joy of the elect, now a torrent, now a fountain of life: a torrent to signify the abundance of the delights which inundate the heart, a fountain to express their ever limpid, ever exhaustless course. So that the felicity of a faithful soul is infinite and inexplicable, not only on account of the plenitude of the happiness in which it consists, but also on account of the

[1] City of God. [2] Ps. xxxv. 9. [3] Matt. xxv. 21. [4] Gen. xv. 1.

certainty of its eternity, which forms the climax of this celestial beatitude.

Article II.

Of the eternity of the happiness of the saints, and of the certainty which they possess of never losing it.

1. *The happiness of the saints shall be eternal.*

Souls destined for heaven, yield yourselves up to transports of gratitude and gladness; for the joys, the delights which are prepared for you shall last for ever. Yes, the delights which await the just shall be lasting, perpetual, eternal. In this happy kingdom no cause shall ever be able to effect the destruction of the spiritual soul, no sin shall ever necessitate its expulsion from paradise; and the motive which shall cause it to desire its preservation shall exist eternally. This motive is the happiness of seeing, loving, and possessing God; and since God, by the necessity of His nature, cannot cease to be, so also no event shall ever be able to make a soul cease to desire its own preservation. It shall then be immortal, and its happiness shall be interminable in the possession of God.

The glory prepared for the saints can be eternal, because the power of God has no limits: it is meet that it should be eternal, because the infinite love of God and His munificence in rewarding require it; it must be eternal, otherwise it would not equal the price at which Jesus Christ purchased it for us. For, to acquire this heavenly inheritance for us, He has paid His Father a ransom of infinite value, by shedding His blood and suffering death on the cross. Consequently, in order that there should be a proportion between the labour

and the stipend, between the price and the object acquired, it is necessary that the joys of paradise should be infinite, if not in their intensity at least in their duration; they must then be eternal.

But we have other proofs still of this truth. God is infinitely faithful in His promises, He is omnipotent to accomplish those which He has made: now, He has a thousand times reiterated with an oath in the Old and the New Law, the engagement of giving an eternal recompense to the elect: 'the just shall live for evermore,'[1] 'everlasting joy shall be upon their heads,'[2] 'they shall shine as stars for all eternity,'[3] 'they shall reign for ever and ever.'[4] From these consoling testimonies I confidently conclude that the eternity of the recompense of heaven is one of the principal dogmas of our faith, the truth of which it would be heresy to doubt. St. Augustine, unable to restrain his rapture at the thought of heaven, cries out: 'Oh, kingdom of a blessed eternity, where the flower of youth never fades, where charity never suffers diminution, where health is always incorruptible, and joy unalloyed, where life has no longer a term,' I believe in thee with an utter certitude, I hope in thee firmly, I love thee ardently! Oh, when shall the hapless vicissitudes and inconstancy of my soul be fixed in thy immutable stability?

The glory of the world expires little by little, until at length it is buried with man in the same tomb. All those gods of the earth, all those monarchs of the universe, whose courtiers formerly worshipped them as so many divinities, now despoiled of their majesty and power, scarcely fill with their ashes the funereal urn. Formerly the terror of the world, they are now but a

[1] Wisd. v. 16. [2] Isaias xxxv. 10. [3] Dan. xii. 3. [4] Apoc. xxii. 5.

magnificent nothing which the darkness of oblivion envelops. During some brief moments their name made a noise; but because their time was limited 'their memory hath perished with' all 'the noise'[1] of their pride. How many great men and heroes of antiquity are there not of whom the memory is altogether lost, who are never spoken of, never thought of? All the glory and splendour of their name has vanished like lightning or smoke.

But console thyself, faithful soul! the glory granted to the just in the regions of bliss shall never perish. As long as God shall be God, their name shall be blessed: 'the just shall be in everlasting remembrance.'[2] This whole universe shall be subverted and destroyed; after this general subversion, thousands of thousands of years shall elapse, and millions and millions of years shall also flow on, and the duration of the blessed eternity shall not have diminished even by a moment; as many thousands of ages shall elapse as there are leaves on the trees, and the happiness of the saints shall appear to be but at its commencement. Nay, after this immense chain of years and centuries, new centuries as numerous as the atoms in the air, grains of sand upon the earth, shall likewise pass, and the blessed shall be still happy, still in felicity and in the zenith of beatitude.

If 'one day in Thy courts, O Lord, is better above a thousand days,'[3] than a thousand years spent in the most seductive delights and the greatest honours of this world, what must it be to enjoy such a happiness eternally? If one single day, one single hour, in the heavenly country is sweeter and more delightful than

[1] Ps. ix. 7. [2] Ibid. cxi. 16. [3] Ibid. lxxxiii. 11.

long years spent here below under the happiest auspices, what must it be to live centuries, a million, a thousand million centuries, submerged in this ocean of divine joys?

And, nevertheless, after all these centuries, beyond all these ages, not only do we not reach eternity's term, but we are still at its commencement; for its measure is not time, it is God Himself whose existence has no measure and knows neither commencement, nor middle, nor end. Oh, blessed eternity, endless circumference, whose radii are, *ever, never,* whose centre is the complement of all goods, thou shalt henceforward be the object of my desires, the rule of my actions; thou shalt be a continual spur to me to tend to perfection. The hope of obtaining thee shall facilitate all that is difficult, sweeten all that is bitter, lighten all that is painful in the path of virtue.

2. *The saints shall possess their happiness without fear of losing it.*

What completes the happiness of the saints is the security with which they possess their heavenly life, and the certainty they possess of never losing it. This assurance is the climax of their infinite and eternal beatitude; for the most precious diamond in the crown of the elect is the knowledge that their lot shall be eternal, is to be as certain of this truth as of the immutability of God Himself. Now the foundation stone on which this truth rests, is the authority of the word of Him who can neither deceive nor be deceived; and who, with an oath, has promised eternal happiness to those who love Him. All the evangelists, the apostles, and the prophets are witnesses and guarantees of this sacred engagement entered into by God Himself: in-

spired by the Holy Ghost they have published it throughout the earth in their writings and sermons. But the Blessed shall see the solidity of this promise in the essence of God, as in a faithful mirror, with a clear and distinct vision.

It would be equally preposterous and impious to suppose that the infinitely perfect Being cannot or will not observe promises which He has so solemnly given; the absurdity of such a proposition will appear to the elect beyond all dispute, because they shall know both the infinite power of God by which He will always be able to accomplish what He has promised, and His immutable fidelity, by which He will always wish to do so. They shall see that these two perfections, power and fidelity, are infinite and essential to the divine nature, and this view will impart to their conscience a clear proof of the eternity of their happiness.

And besides, could they doubt of this truth, they would cease to be perfectly happy. For, says St. Augustine, 'there is no real felicity, once we can foresee a term to it.'[1] The fear of losing this happiness, of being one day deprived of beholding so admirable a Beauty, and of loving so perfect an Amiability, would be a drop of gall capable of embittering all their joys, a sting which would continually inflict new wounds on the soul, a worm which would consume their vesture of glory; in a word, heaven would cease to be heaven, were not the inhabitants certain of its eternity; and 'the recompense would no longer be superabundant,'[2] were it to have an end.

Far from us, O Infinite Goodness; far from us be a suspicion so unworthy Thy exhaustless liberality. The

[1] City of God. [2] Gen. xv.

elect shall possess Thee without any fear of losing Thee, their lot shall be eternally happy on account of the assurance that it shall last for ever. This consoling thought shall be constantly present to their memory: I am happy; I am in heaven; I shall be there eternally: my heart swims in an ocean of the purest delights; it shall do so for ever! I possess a perfect and inexpressible happiness, and I shall possess it eternally! Oh, what sweetness, what joy, what abundance of peace!

From all these reasons let us conclude, what we have undertaken to prove, that the glory of the saints after death is incomprehensible and infinite, not only on account of the fulness of the happiness they enjoy, but, also on account of the certainty of its eternal duration.

Since such is the case, let us exert all our powers to attain the perfection of virtue, thus to insure to ourselves a larger share in these infinite joys. Incited by the hope of so magnificent a reward, let us despise all difficulties; let us walk fearless of the thorns which may wound the feet of those who follow the rugged road of perfection. How foolish are those who deprive themselves of as many degrees of this eternal beatitude as they omit acts of virtue, and squander graces! How inimical to their own best interest are those who expose themselves to the irreparable loss of so many precious pearls with which they might have adorned their crown, as they let pass opportunities of increasing their number! No; since the beauty of the heavenly courts is so enchanting, they are unworthy of it who do not vigilantly guard against all that could estrange them therefrom, who do not courageously do and suffer all that could lead them to it and augment its joys.

O mortals! raise, I conjure you, your eyes on high:

paradise is offered to you; it has been created for you. The joys of this desirable abode are infinite and eternal; they are assured to us if we will it. The price required for its acquisition is but little, for the Sovereign Lord 'shall save us for nothing.' It is the God, faithful and true, who has promised it in Scripture. What then are our dispositions? We confess this dogma of faith with the lips; do we seriously believe it in our hearts? Alas! our conduct renders it but too doubtful.

For what then is this faith which believes the wonders that are related of the Holy City, and which leaves us oblivious and reckless of heaven? What is this belief which confesses that 'the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us,'[1] and which, terrified by the least difficulty, shamefully abandons the narrow way which leads to heaven! Fools that we are, we spend our lives complaining of the miseries of this world, and are indifferent to the happiness of heaven: like the dog of the fable, we pursue the shadow of a good which flies from us, and we neglect to drink at the source of sovereign Goodness. We amass earthly riches by dint of fatigue, and we concern ourselves but little about winning 'for heaven the' only 'treasure which faileth not.'[2] What lamentable folly! What do I say? The greater number of men have reached such a degree of folly that they are not ashamed to barter this kingdom of true felicity to the devil for a fleeting pleasure, a bauble, a little dust, a phantom of honour! There are Christians who have the hardihood to abandon their rights to their heavenly inheritance, though they know that the goods are infinite and eternal, and that they cannot lose them without incurring eternal

[1] Rom. viii. 18. [2] Luke xii. 33.

damnation; they renounce them, alas! I blush to say it, for an ephemeral gratification. Let us not be surprised, therefore, if 'hell opens her mouth' to swallow up these impious men, and if 'fire and brimstone, and storms of wind, *shall* be the portion of their cup.'[1]

O Lord! terrified at the danger of incurring so dire a misfortune, 'I will light my candle and sweep my house,' that is my conscience, and, replenished with the desire of the heavenly beatitude, I will seek until I shall have found this inestimable Groat.[2] I believe that if during life I serve Thee faithfully, if I attach myself to the practice of solid virtue, after death I shall enjoy an eternal happiness, I shall enter into the abode of Thy glory, where 'Thou wilt fill me with joy with Thy countenance,'[3] where I shall find all that I desire, whence I shall be removed from all that could inspire me with fear, where there shall be a joy unmixed with grief, a peace without war, a rest without disquietude, a life without death; where, in a word, there shall be the plenitude of happiness, the certainty of eternity. I hope, O my God! that I shall see in Thee all that is beautiful, that I shall love all that is good, that I shall taste all that is delicious, that I shall hear all that is charming. I desire to see Thee, to love Thee, to possess Thee, to enjoy Thee with all the saints, to see the first Truth, to love the essential Beauty, to possess the sovereign Goodness, to enjoy the eternal Felicity. Oh! when shall I enter into the place where Thy Tabernacle reposes?

[1] Ps. xv. 11. [2] Luke xv. 8. [3] Ps. xv. 11.

Article III.

The consequences which we should draw from these truths.

The joys of the saints are incomprehensible and infinite, they are eternal and secure for eternity. The plenitude of the happiness of the elect, the certainty that is interminable, behold in what the perfection of their felicity consists. 'The recompense of the saints,' says St. Bernard, 'is so great that it is impossible to measure it, so copious that it is exhaustless, so precious that it is inestimable.' 'No,' let us now say with St. Jerome, 'no labour shall appear too painful, nor any time of trial too long, when it has for guerdon an eternal reward.' In fact, since the glory of the saints is incomprehensible on account of the plenitude of their happiness and the certitude that it shall be eternal, there is nothing that we should not avoid, nothing that we should not do, nothing that we should not suffer, to obtain this happy fate: let us resume these three consequences.

1. *We should avoid all that could alienate us from heaven.*

The felicity of the saints in the possession of God is infinite and eternal. We should be in the disposition, therefore, to avoid all that could alienate us from heaven; we should be ready to sacrifice everything to acquire it, were it even an object more useful than our hand or foot, dearer than our eyes, than our own life. This is an express commandment of the divine Legislator: 'If thy hand or thy foot scandalise thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; and if thy eye scandalise thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee. It is better for thee to go into

life, maimed and lame, or with one eye, than having two hands, or two feet, or two eyes, to be cast into everlasting fire.'[1] Such is the language of our Head, our Master, Jesus Christ.

And yet, oh, lamentable blindness of the world! and yet the greater number of men, even while confessing this truth, do not hesitate to do evil: they sell and alienate an infinite happiness for a despicable gain; eternal delights for a momentary pleasure; a certain felicity for an uncertain honour; they esteem the eternal Tabernacles less than a house of clay, and they live as though no merit were necessary in order to be admitted to the abode of everlasting bliss!

O Christian! enter into thyself, and open thy soul to the divine light; mortal sin deprives thee of thy right to heaven: thou knowest it, and still thou darest to commit it. Where then is thy faith? O religious! venial sin will insensibly lead thee to mortal, and thus separate thee for ever from the society of the elect; thou art convinced of it, and thou takest no precautions. Where then is thy prudence? O man of the world! this familiarity is dangerous, this state of life in which thou abidest, this employment which thou exercisest, are an obstacle to thy salvation, an occasion of ruin for thy soul, the commencement of its perdition; thou art aware of it, and thou renouncest them not; where then is thy wisdom? O man! 'grown old in evil days,'[2] this guilty habit, for which thou shalt be despoiled of the robe of glory, shall most certainly cast thee into the fire of hell; thou foreseest it and thou correctest it not; what folly! wretched being! already earth opens its jaws, heaven thunders forth, the abysses of hell yawn beneath thy feet, and

[1] Matt. xviii. 8. [2] Dan. xv. 52.

thou sportest on the brink of the precipice. Already the avenging sword of divine Justice is suspended over thee, it is about to inflict a deadly and unexpected wound upon thee; and reckless of thy soul, thou sleepest in thy bad habits, and instead of being roused by the thunderbolts of divine wrath, thou plungest still deeper into thy mortal lethargy, and yet thou dost not the less aspire to the hope of an eternal repose. Oh, impious and senseless confidence, whose 'end is devouring flames!'[1]

It is painful and difficult, dost thou say, to eradicate one's habits, correct one's vices, to fly such and such occasions. But I only ask thee to look up at that magnificent heaven, to contemplate that infinite and eternal beatitude, to consider the sublimity of that throne which is reserved for thee: yield to my entreaties; should this view, this pious thought be less efficacious and less powerful than they were formerly over the youngest of the Machabees? King Antiochus sought by threats and promises to induce the youngest child of this heroic family to abandon the religion of his fathers: his mother, who feared that a boy of such tender years might succumb to weakness, employed no other motive to confirm him in the true faith than that of the hope of heaven. 'My son,' said she to him, 'look up to heaven, I conjure thee.'[2] There it is that thy already victorious brothers await thee; soon thou shalt be associated with them, and thou shalt participate in their happy fate; it is there that the 'momentary and light tribulations of the present life,' shall be followed for thee by 'an eternal weight of glory.'[3] I therefore ask but one thing of thee, my son, that thou look up to heaven, that thou remember heaven, that thou recall to mind the happiness which

[1] Heb. vi. 8. [2] 2 Mach. vii. 28. [3] 2 Cor. iv. 17.

awaits thee there. He obeyed, he looked up, he reflected, he remembered heaven. And insultingly addressing the tyrant, and despising his tortures, he followed the example of his brothers; 'he delivered up his body and his soul,' to the fury of the executioners, 'for the defence of the law of his fathers.'

This admirable exhortation of the mother of the Machabees to her son, the Mother of Mercy addresses from heaven to each one of us: 'My child, look up to heaven, I beseech thee,' says our sweet Mother Mary to us. When the infernal fowler environs thee with the nets of temptation, when the perfidious flesh incites thee to sensual gratification, when the world seeks to surprise thee by the magic of its seductions, raise thy eyes to this star-bedizened home, behold the crown promised to the victor, weigh in the balance on one side the inexhaustible and eternal delights of paradise, and on the other this pleasure, this gratification, this ephemeral honour which thou covetest, which thou hopest to reap from that sin, that irregular desire, that bad passion, and decide impartially on which side thou oughtest to make the scales incline. I appeal to the tribunal of thy own reason; be thyself the arbiter, decide if a prudent man, a Christian above all, can barter infinite and endless joys for a light and fleeting pleasure. Pause and consider attentively what judgment thy soul will pronounce on this important question at the hour of death. If we regard Symmachus's abdication of his kingdom for a glass of water as an act of folly, and the conduct of Esau in having 'sold his birthright for a mess of pottage,'[1] as madness, what insanity is it not to despise, relinquish, sacrifice an incomprehensible glory for a slight conveni-

[1] Gen. xxv. 33.

ence, a trivial advantage, a phantom of honour, and to renounce such untold blessings without sorrow or regret?

Symmachus and Esau renounced only temporal and perishable goods, and yet the one shed tears of regret, and the other 'roared with a great cry.'[1] But weep, oh, angels! when a Christian, after having by a deplorable rashness sacrificed his right to an infinite felicity for 'a little barley, for a morsel of bread,'[2] goes away without giving himself the least concern about the future, to jest with his friends, and seek every kind of amusement, utterly indifferent to the loss he has sustained. Oh, imprudent banker! were thy servant to exchange a priceless diamond for a piece of glass, thou wouldst fly into a passion with him, and yet thou barterest heaven for mud, and thou laughest! But 'I will go to confession,' dost thou say, 'the evil is not irreparable, I shall be able to recover what I have lost by penance?' Who then has assured thee that thou shalt have the grace and time to perform a serious penance? By one mortal sin thou forfeitest thy right to heaven; this is a certain fact; but whether thou shalt expiate thy sin by sincere sorrow, is but too doubtful. Is it meet, therefore, for a prudent man to allow his eternal felicity to depend on an event so uncertain?

Let us suppose, however, that God in His great mercy should grant thee the grace and time to repent, hast thou received the divine promise that thou wilt avail thyself of this twofold benefit? Grace and time have already been refused to thousands; countless others have had grace and time, they have abused them, and died in their sin. May not what has happened to so many others likewise befall thee?

[1] Gen. xxvii. 34. [2] Ezech. xiii. 19.

Ah, unfortunate man! thou mayest die in sin; yes, oh, sinner! hear and tremble in all thy members, thou mayest die in sin. And if by a just judgment of God this misfortune should befall thee, it is all over with thy soul; it is excluded for ever from paradise, and its loss is irreparable. Thou believest this, and thou dost not fear to commit mortal sin. Fool! thou wouldst not dare to risk the loss of a few pieces of gold, and thou hast the temerity to risk heaven! and it is not an infidel, a barbarian, an idolator who is guilty of this rashness; it is a Christian: a Christian, I say, who knows on the infallible word of God for what blessings he is destined, and who often even teaches it to others in his sermons. Let us then either renounce our faith, or reform our lives; let us relinquish the hope of heaven, or cease to live as we have done up to this. O Sovereign Lord of heaven! Thou hast displayed the might of Thy arm, Thou hast exhausted the treasures of Thy Wisdom, to prepare an eternal happiness for me; Jesus Christ has shed His precious blood in torrents to merit it for me, and I renounce this throne of glory for a mere trifle. But I blush at my folly; henceforward I will avoid, shun, abhor all that could deprive me of these infinite joys, that is to say, all that is sinful, or the occasion of sin. O God, arbiter of my life! grant that I may die this moment, shouldst Thou foresee that I should ever in future offend Thee, the Sovereign Goodness, by mortal sin.

2. *We should do all that can lead to heaven.*

It does not suffice to avoid all that could alienate us from heaven, but we must also perform courageously all that can lead us thither, however painful or difficult it

may be. The happiness of the elect is infinite and eternal; to merit it, therefore, we must adopt all the means, practise all the virtues which lead most surely to it, and accept unfalteringly all the difficulties of so noble an enterprise. Reason and the love which we owe to ourselves imperatively demand that we do so.

In truth, is not he his own worst enemy, who refuses a light and easy labour for the acquisition of inappreciable goods? By a just dispensation of the divine decrees 'no one shall be crowned except he strives lawfully;'[1] 'no one shall receive the crown of life if he has not been proved;'[2] 'only to them who overcome shall it be given to eat of the fruit of the tree of life, which is in paradise,'[3] consequently we are bound to fight, to suffer, and to triumph, to go up 'into the palm-tree of glory and take hold of the fruit thereof.'[4] But the very facility of the labour which acquires such felicity for the saints shall augment their happiness in heaven; for, casting a retrospective glance on their lives, they will perceive that for a slight and short term of labour they have gained 'an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that cannot fade,'[5] that with so little fatigue they have recovered this divine groat, this inestimable diamond, this priceless treasure, for the acquisition of which our Saviour has taught us that we should sell all the rest. In reality, whatever efforts we may make, they are still trifling, considered in themselves, and compared with the difficulties which must be surmounted and overcome, in order to succeed in the world.

They are trifling, considered in themselves. All that is required of us is that we obey the commands of a

[1] 2 Tim. ii. 5. [2] James i. 12. [3] Apoc. ii. 7.
[4] Cant. vii. 8. [5] 1 Pet. i. 4.

Master who loves us devotedly, One who is infinitely good and wise, and who is perfectly aware of our weakness. 'If thou wouldst enter into life,' says Jesus Christ, 'keep My commandments,'[1] accept them fearlessly, for 'My yoke is sweet and My burden light.' What an assurance is this! and He who gives it to us is that loving Saviour whose condescension has reduced His divine legislation to two precepts only in order that we might not be terrified by their multitude: to love God more than ourselves and our neighbour as ourselves, on 'these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets.'[2] Judge now, and say whether what is asked of you is too difficult, not only for a Christian daily 'nourished up in the words of faith,'[3] but even for a man engaged in worldly avocations. Oh, souls created to love! is it then so difficult and disgraceful to bestow a stronger and more enduring love on the incomprehensible Beauty, on infinite Amiability, on the Centre of all perfections, than on a covering of corruption, a haunt of insects, a handful of dust: to absolute nothingness, for all that thou art, O man, whoever thou mayest be? Is it so hard to refrain from inflicting on thy neighbour the evil which thou wouldst not wish to have done to thyself? Once more, does such behaviour exact that a Christian should offer himself too much violence?

O Divine Love! Thou lovest man with an eternal, continuous, and purely gratuitous charity; Thou loadest him with benefits: and man, oh, hateful perversity! man endowed with reason, loaded with so many graces, finds it too painful to love Thee more than himself, and to love his neighbour as himself for love of Thee; it

[1] Matt. xix. 17. [2] Ibid. xxii. 40. [3] 1 Tim. iv. 6.

seems as though he were unable to refrain from offending and hating thee. How withhold our indignation at such a thought? My God, we love Thee not, we are not solicitous to obtain heaven, and yet the efforts required to merit this happiness are but trifling, considered in themselves.

2. They are also very easy compared with the vigils and fatigues to which worldlings condemn themselves. Look at a father of a family, a merchant, a lawyer, a judge, a courtier, a royal minister: how many sleepless nights do they not spend!—with how many cares do they not embarrass themselves!—to how many vain studies do they not sacrifice their health!—what fears agitate them!—what anxieties torment them!—some to procure a little wealth and honour, others to win the uncertain and fickle favour of princes. Consider even men in the lowest grades of society: for a trivial gain they labour day and night, they endure heat and cold without a murmur. What fatigues and hardships do not soldiers and sailors likewise bear! what dangers do they not face to obtain a petty reward! Let us compare the labours of the children of the world with the trifling efforts which God exacts of us for the acquisition of the kingdom of heaven; let us compare the yoke of the world with the yoke of Jesus Christ, the commands of earthly potentates with the precepts of the Lord of heaven, and we shall own that the latter are a thousand times sweeter and easier than the former. Could the miser discover a considerable treasure, or, better still, a mine of gold, by the avoidance of a mortal sin; could an ambitious or voluptuous man, on the same condition, the one obtain the throne of a mighty empire, the other incessantly enjoy new pleasures, both the one

and the other would certainly be vigilantly on their guard against us. Well, at this price we may acquire the richest of all treasures, an immortal crown, exhaustless delights, and yet we have the cowardice to complain of the severity of the conditions imposed upon us, we will not consent to do for heaven what so many others willingly do for earth!

Angels of peace weep over the impious blindness of men! Satan cries out to them: 'Serve me and I will give you gold,' and they serve him. God conjures them: 'Love Me and I will give you paradise,' and they love Him not. They love the world and the flesh, they love trifles, for one Love alone is not loved, though He promises an endless eternity of infinite happiness to those who love Him. The least effort appears too difficult, the least labour too painful to obtain sovereign felicity; and those who dread so much the little that it is necessary to do for heaven are precisely those who regard the tyrannical slavery to which the world holds them as a light and sweet burden.

If to merit the happiness of the elect we were only to accept the hundredth part of the trials which we willingly endure for the acquisition of riches and honours, the Church would reckon us amongst her greatest saints. But, on the contrary, we toil, we fatigue ourselves, giving ourselves no repose either day or night, and we do but amass fuel for purgatory. Is it not disgraceful that Jews take more trouble to extend their usury than Christians do to serve God; that worldlings do more for their reprobation than the sacred ministers themselves do for their salvation; that soldiers endure more severe hardships to gain some military distinction than religious do to win heaven?

O my God! Thou neglectest nothing to procure eternal life for us; and we, notwithstanding Thy charity, languish in indifference. The demon employs all his artifices to rob us of our patrimony, and we slumber in slothful security. The saints go before us, animating and inviting us to follow them by their example and the splendour of their glory, and we sleep in tepidity. We do not move a hand or foot to endeavour to gain an immortal and unfading crown.

Jesus Christ assures us that 'the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and that only the violent bear it away;'[1] and yet we flatter our flesh, give free scope to our desires, place no restraint on our senses, seek on every occasion our convenience in diet and clothing, in lodging and sleep; the mere mention of the hair shirt, of abstinence and of the discipline, makes us shudder; nevertheless, we still aspire to quench our thirst one day at the same torrent of delights that inebriates the elect. But are we not aware that there is no medium, that we must necessarily renounce either the joys of heaven or the pleasures of earth, 'since no one can relish here below the joys of the world and afterwards reign with Jesus Christ?'[2]

Pause an instant, oh, my soul! consider and decide the choice which thou wilt make. But reflect well beforehand, that every act for which thou subjectest thy spirit, resistest thy senses, mortifiest thy will, repressest thy passions, moderatest thy anger, or practisest any supernatural virtue, merits a new degree of infinite glory. As often, on the contrary, as thou flatterest thy flesh, obeyest thy self-love, allowest the opportunity of offering thyself violence to escape, so often dost thou

[1] Matt. xi. 12. [2] Imit. b. i. ch. xxiv.

irrevocably sacrifice a new eternity of ineffable delights. For, according to Philo, 'the pleasures of the present life are so many larcenies on the life to come.'

When, for example, we deny our eyes the indulgence of curiosity, we merit by this mortification of the sight a more sublime degree of unending glory: we derive the same fruit from the mortification of the other senses, and the resistance of the irregular movements of the soul. Let us realise this doctrine, and then see afterwards how we are resolved to act in order to acquire the blissful eternity; for, since 'the house of God is so great, and the place of His possession so vast,'[1] assuredly we should make every effort to deserve to inherit it. Perhaps, like St. Augustine, we are grieved at the prospect of so many sacrifices. 'Shall I be able to forego these kinds of pleasures?' do we exclaim, 'shall such and such an object be interdicted me from this moment?'[2] But let us bear well in mind that we are not denied all joy, we are only asked to postpone it. We long for happiness, this is a legitimate desire; but let us wait a little while and we shall enjoy a superabundance of purest delights in our everlasting home. We wish for honours, this is also allowable; but let us have patience, and soon, in the kingdom of His immortal glory, God Himself will be our throne and our crown. We desire riches: this is not censurable; let us consent to a little delay, and in a short time we shall become the possessors of an inexhaustible treasure in heaven. In a word, neither pleasures, nor riches, nor honours are refused to us: they are only deferred in order to substitute infinite and eternal rewards for perishable and fleeting goods.

Should so advantageous an exchange seem insupport-

[1] Baruch iii. 24. [2] Conf. b. viii.

able to us? What! is it not better to gather ripe and abundant fruits later on, than to take them from the tree whilst they are still bitter and almost in the germ? Is it not better and more prudent to wait till autumn to enjoy the sweets of the grape in its maturity than to gather an acid verjuice in midsummer? Since this delay appears to us so rational, why should we not be equally content to await the time for eternal goods? Truly, it is an incomprehensible mystery that we should be so blind when there is question of solid happiness, while we are so clear-sighted concerning what is but smoke and vanity.

3. *We should bear everything that can augment our glory in heaven.*

We should suffer everything to gain the supreme happiness promised to the just. The glory of heaven is eternal and infinite; consequently it deserves that we patiently and willingly endure all adversities to obtain and augment it in us. Does not reason itself proclaim that short and trifling sufferings are not too high a price to pay for everlasting joys? Nevertheless, there are men who will not tolerate any pain, endure any affliction, bear anything for heaven. A sick man unhesitatingly takes the most nauseous draughts and courageously submits to the lance and fire of the physician, whose orders he promptly obeys, in order to prolong this mortal and wretched life for a few years: but a Christian will do nothing to gain an eternal life; everything appears severe and irksome to him, and the mere mention of mortification makes him shudder. Should we not blush at this dastardly and culpable delicacy? Listen, then, pusillanimous souls! you who set so little

value on the kingdom of God, listen to what the infallible truth has declared to us, 'the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us.'[1]

But we have likewise as securities for this truth the illustrious choirs of apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins, and the innumerable army of the elect who, with loud acclaim, cry out to us from heaven: 'Yes, mortals! all the pains, all the calamities, all the sufferings, all the trials of this life bear no proportion with that glory which shall one day be revealed in you. They are but a light and momentary tribulation compared with the eternal weight of glory which they have already wrought in us.'[2] This is a dogma of faith which no one can doubt without sin.

Oh! how the elect now rejoice at the labours, afflictions, sufferings of all kinds which they have endured during life! How the holy penitents congratulate themselves on the voluntary mortifications and violence they have imposed on themselves! With what consolation the martyrs recall their chains, gridirons, racks, wounds! With what love the apostles contemplate the instruments of their torture and martyrdom!

Happy afflictions, happy sufferings! do the glorious inhabitants of heaven exclaim. Oh, griefs, humiliations, poverty, blessed, a thousand times blessed are you, since you have wrought in us such happiness! To you we are indebted for the sublime rank to which we are exalted: but for you we should have perished: you have been the ladder by which we ascended to this throne of glory. Very far from regretting their humble, penitent, mortified life, they cry out in transports of joy: 'We rejoice for

[1] Rom. viii. 18. [2] 2 Cor. iv. 17.

the days in which Thou hast humbled us, for the years in which we have seen evils.'[1]

Were they capable of experiencing any grief, their one regret would be that they had not suffered more; for they would assuredly accept the torments of the damned could they thus merit one single degree of greater glory. Nay, the demons themselves would, as they have often been forced to admit, willingly endure the flames which consume them till the day of judgment, were it afterwards granted them to behold for one moment the infinite beauty and amiability of God.

O God! wert Thou, as the price of the happiness which Thou promisest us, to command us to sacrifice all our wealth, to pluck out an eye, to cut off a hand or a foot, to endure all kinds of tortures and most excruciating diseases, Thou wouldst not demand too much, since the reward infinitely transcends all that can be done or suffered to merit it. And, nevertheless, according to the testimony of Thy apostle, Thou only imposest 'a momemtary and light tribulation' on us. For all that we suffer is light in comparison with the eternal weight of glory which is its guerdon. All that we endure is equally short and transient, since our whole life, compared with eternity, is but a fleeting moment. But, alas! this brief and light affliction still seems to us hard and insupportable. Sensual that we are! 'it was necessary that Christ should suffer in order to enter into His glory,'[2] Christ, 'who did no sin and' in whose 'mouth guile was not.'[3] It was necessary that He should suffer torments unheard of for their intensity, terrible for their variety, inconceivable for their number. And we, sinners, whose iniquities exceed in number the hairs of our head,'[4] we

[1] Ps. lxxxix. 15. [2] Luke xxiv. 26. [3] 1 Pet. ii. 22. [4] Ps. xxix. 13.

will not submit to bear anything for a happy eternity! We expect to arrive there by a different route than that of the royal road of the Cross! But in vain 'hath iniquity lied against itself.'[1] The decree is pronounced; we must either suffer or forfeit heaven; whoever refuses to suffer shall never arrive there. It is a divine and immutable decree that 'through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.'[2] From this truth, the joys of heaven are infinite and eternal, necessarily flow these moral consequences: we must shun all that could alienate us from heaven; we must do all that can lead us there; we must endure all that can increase our glory therein. Let us listen, then, oh, my soul! to the wise admonition of Thomas à Kempis: 'Write, read, sing the praises of God, keep silence, pray, suffer adversity with courage: eternal life is worthy all these combats and many more.'[3]

CHAPTER VI.

Of final perseverance.

THE consideration of the eternal and infinite joys of heaven should undoubtedly excite in us an ardent desire of the glory of the elect, and prove a powerful incentive to the practice of solid virtue, which is the direct path thereto. But the inestimable treasure of solid virtue, and of perfect happiness in heaven, shall never be acquired except by perseverance, for it is only 'he that shall persevere to the end' that shall be perfect in the sight of God, and consequently that 'shall be saved.'[4]

[1] Ps. xxvi. 18.
[2] Acts xiv. 21.
[3] Imit. b. iii. ch. iv.
[4] Matt. x. 22.

Perseverance is a certain mark of predestination, and the seal of the elect; it is the soul, the sign, the glorious crown of all virtues, which, without it, are destitute of all value and merit. To convince ourselves well of the necessity of perseverance, we shall terminate this work by a very concise explanation of the admirable privileges awarded to our constancy in good, the evils which follow our instability in virtue, and the most appropriate means of rectifying the natural mutability of our hearts.

Article I.

Privileges awarded to our constancy in good.

1. *It assimilates us to the saints and to God Himself.*

The just man, firm and constant in good, acquires even here below a happy stability almost comparable to the new and incorruptible life on which he will enter on the last day. Even in this life the just man who perseveres is superior to all the vicissitudes and inconstancy of other men; he confidently maintains the equilibrium of his soul in the balance of justice; his virtue is not subject to decay, and the fadeless flowers of sanctity which it produces preserve in his heart a perpetual spring in which winter and storms are alike unknown. He even becomes, in some sort, as immutable as God; and it may be said of him, though in a different degree, that he is not subject 'to change, or any shadow of alteration.'[1] It is true Job has said that 'among the saints none are unchangeable,'[2] and that man of his nature 'never continueth in the same state;'[3] still, by the grace of perseverance, a friend of God elevates

[1] James i. 17. [2] Job xv. 15. [3] Ibid. xiv. 2.

himself to the sublime degree of a kind of resemblance to the divine immutability. How excellent, therefore, is this virtue of constancy in good, which communicates to us, even in this valley of tears, the inestimable privilege of a similarity with the saints and the Divinity itself!

2. *It gives us a firm hope of final perseverance and of our eternal predestination.*

Theologians teach that it is possible in this life to recognise, or at least foresee, by certain marks, what souls shall be numbered amongst the elect and associated in the felicity of the blessed; but they own at the same time that the greater number of those marks are equivocal and subject to error, and that frequently they are deceptive. Nevertheless, all agree in saying that constancy in good is the most certain indication of our predestination. This constancy commences here below, by a kind of anticipation, to confirm us in an unalterable instability which is the appanage of eternal beatitude. Because the just man directs all his steps towards the heavenly Jerusalem, he is entitled to console himself with the legitimate hope of one day being a citizen of that holy city. When the Doctors of the Church speak of the divine decree concerning the salvation of men, or rather of their predestination, they represent it to us as a mysterious chain, composed of innumerable links, which, on the side of God, are the successive graces which He grants to His elect, and by which most certainly He has made them reach heaven, but this, however, without compromising their liberty; and which are on our side the continual acts of virtue by which we correspond faithfully with the divine inspirations.

Each correspondence with grace is a new act of perse-

verance: the last of these acts, to which all those which precede it refer as their term, completes final perseverance, and becomes the glorious crown of the whole life. Now, just as he who holds the first links of a chain is sure of being able to draw the entire of it to him, even so the just man who, through life, perseveres constantly in the practice of good works, acquires the right to hope that he shall be firm unto death, since the continual practice of virtue is an excellent disposition of soul to merit perseverance and eternal happiness which is its fruit.

Strong in this truth, Paul, that vessel of election, foretold his own predestination with the certainty of a divine inspiration. 'There is laid up for me a crown of justice,' said he, 'which the Lord, the just Judge, will render to me on the great day'[1] of eternity. Elsewhere he had declared that he looked upon himself as 'one born out of due time,'[2] and 'the chief of sinners;'[3] but at the end of his life his confidence revives, and no longer a prey to disquietude, he says to his disciples, 'The Lord hath delivered me and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom.'[4]

His perseverance in piety, sustained during a long succession of years, was the foundation of this confidence. 'I have fought the good fight,' he says, 'I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; my conscience bears me this testimony.' From this long habit of virtue, he feared not to conclude with steadfast hope: 'Yes, the divine goodness will grant me the grace of final perseverance, the crown of justice is reserved for me.' So sure and infallible a pledge to the apostle of his election to glory was the remembrance of his constancy.

[1] 2 Tim. iv. 8. [2] 1 Cor. xv. 8. [3] 1 Tim. i. 15. [4] 2 Tim. iv. 18.

Now, what motive could be more capable than this of deciding a soul desirous of salvation to walk unflinchingly in the paths of sanctity?

3. *It perfects and crowns the other virtues.*

This is the doctrine of the sainted Bishop of Hippo: 'It is of little moment to begin well,' said he, 'but the important thing is to end well.'[1] St. Isidore of Spain inculcates the same: 'It is not he who acts well who is happy, it is he who does so always.' St. Jerome adds: 'In a Christian it is not the beginning but the continuation and end that is examined; Paul commenced ill and he ended well. The beginnings of Judas were promising, but his end was execrable for his treason. True virtue, therefore, does not consist in beginning well, but in persevering.' Thus, according to the doctrine of the Fathers, it is perseverance alone which impresses on our actions the seal of solid virtue, and renders them meritorious. It is true that a degree of glory corresponds to each virtuous action, but this degree shall be granted finally to such only as persevere. 'All the virtues run,' says Peter of Blois, 'but it is only perseverance that shall be crowned.'[2] 'All the virtues,' continues St. Bonaventure, 'merit a crown, but they only obtain it by perseverance.' Let us judge by this how great is the value and the excellence of that virtue which alone insures to us the recompense due to the others.

4. *It is itself a special virtue.*

Constancy in good is not only the complement, the perfection, the soul of all virtues and their one title to

[1] Serm. on Ps. li. [2] Letter 22.

the eternal recompense, *it is* also *a special virtue* and distinct from the others, a virtue which causes man to persevere, says St. Thomas, '*as far as it is necessary in good and meritorious actions.*' '*All that presents a particular difficulty to surmount,*' continues this holy doctor, '*constitutes the principle of a special virtue. Now there is a particular difficulty in persevering for a long time in anything painful ; consequently it is a special virtue to continue steadfast to the end, and unto a perfect consummation in the practice of good.*'[1]

In the accomplishment of virtuous actions, their duration, even the labour and pain which they cost, are circumstances which present a particular difficulty, even a very considerable difficulty, which we cannot overcome without the help of a particular virtue. This virtue is perseverance: it accompanies and animates our good works, it imparts to them a special merit, and distinct from the merit attributed to the substance of the other virtues which have been the principle of it. Such, I repeat, is the excellence and the utility of constancy in good.

5. *We owe to it the consummation of our salvation.*

The work of our redemption was consummated by the invincible constancy of the Saviour, who subjected Himself to the severest hardships during the space of thirty-three years, and who endured unheard-of torments and anguish in His Passion ; the excess and the long duration of His pains and sufferings were never able to damp His courage. With truth could He say to His Father, on the eve of His Passion : 'I have finished the work which

[1] 2, q. 137, a. 1.

Thou gavest me to do,' and justly too could He cry out on the Cross: 'All is consummated.' The scribes and the pharisees ask Him to descend from the cruel gibbet to which they have attached Him: they promise Him on this condition to believe in Him; but He remains immovable, He heeds neither their flattering invitations nor their deceitful promises, and He perseveres in the midst of the most excruciating tortures, until He has gained a complete victory by the sacrifice of His life. What an incentive to us to esteem perseverance above all other goods! In fact, so excellent are its prerogatives, that it is an excess of folly not to insure to ourselves its possession; but, 'having put our hand to the plough to look back,' and through a shameful cowardice to desert from the way of perfection on which we had already entered! O immutable God! fix, I beseech Thee, the levity and inconstancy of my soul, and when my imprudence would alienate me from the paths of piety, do Thou so powerfully restrain my steps 'that neither tribulations, nor distress, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor danger, nor persecution, nor the sword' may ever divert me from it.

Article II.

How prejudicial inconstancy in good is to us.

1. *It renders all our past merits useless.*

When instability leads a soul into mortal sin it despoils it of all the merits it had acquired previous to its fall. No, says St. Basil, 'the pains we have taken shall receive no reward, unless we persevere to the end;' 'without perseverance,' adds St. Bernard, 'he who fights shall obtain no victory, and even the conqueror himself receives no crown.' Had Mary Magdalen quitted our

Lord's tomb when the apostles abandoned it, she would have been deprived of the happy privilege of seeing Jesus Christ immediately after He had risen; but in consequence of having remained perseveringly near the sepulchre she merited to be the first witness of the Saviour's Resurrection.

If 'it is good for a man to bear the Lord's yoke from his youth,' it is the climax of happiness to bear it constantly to the end of life. The workmen who came first to the vineyard, and who bore the weight of the day and of the heat, would have laboured in vain, had they not persevered in their task till sunset. In vain had Matthias quitted the table of imposts, Peter and Andrew renounced their nets and John left his father, if they had not constantly followed and accompanied Jesus; for 'it avails nothing,' says St. Bernard, 'to follow the Saviour if we do not arrive with Him.' Yes; without perseverance, all the good we do, the afflictions we endure, the injuries we bear, are useless and void of fruit. Without constancy in good, nothing is perfect, nothing accomplished, nothing profitable. Perseverance alone crowns all good works; it is by it alone that we reach the term of our course, that we merit the reward of our efforts. Though a man were, like Anthony, to distribute his treasures to the poor; though, like another William, he should relentlessly tear his body with the discipline and the hair shirt; though, like Hilarion, he should attenuate himself by a perpetual fast; though he should endure all the tortures which the rage of tyrants has been able to invent against the martyrs, still, should he by the greatest of all misfortunes fail to persevere to the end of his life, all these good works would avail nothing towards his salvation. This is a dogma of faith. To

whom in reality has our Divine Lord promised salvation? To those who have fought? No; because there are numbers who for a long time strove to win heaven, and who are now reprobates in hell. To those who have run? No; for many have walked with rapid strides in the paths of virtue, but having stopped in the midst of their course, they have forfeited their crown and are lost for ever. To those who had the faith? No; for how many are there not who have received this gift and have become the prey of hell! Who then can hope for a place amongst the elect?

O God of truth! manifest to us the unfathomable mystery of Thy justice. Come, O mortals! attend and hearken to the divine oracle: 'He that shall persevere,' says the Saviour, He that shall persevere 'unto the end, shall be saved.' 'All our hopes,' says Eusebius Emissenus, 'depend on the last act of our life;' because inconstancy may rob us of all the merits already acquired.

Oh, irreparable injury! oh, fearful loss incurred by instability in virtue. Of what avail would it be to have amassed all the wealth of the Indies, should we be shipwrecked on reaching the port? 'Of what advantage is it to me,' says the Bishop of Emesus, 'that my well-sown fields be apparently covered with a rich harvest, if at the season for reaping a violent hurricane and torrents of rain carry off all my corn?' What avails it now to Solomon and Tertullian to have inaugurated their lives with a brilliant lustre of virtue, if they have terminated their career in the dark clouds of inconstancy? What avails it to the dastardly companion of the forty generous soldiers of Sebastian to have endured a long martyrdom with them in the frozen lake, since before death he basely denied his

faith and perished eternally? What reward do those two Japanese Christians now enjoy who bore for several hours the torments of a slow fire in defence of the Faith, but who afterwards apostatised, and who were nevertheless cast into the flames, by order of the tyrant? Alas! they died apostates, they whose early promises seemed to prognosticate that they would win the martyr's crown. How true is this reflection of St. Gregory the Great: 'In vain do we do good if we discontinue it before the end of life:' for he 'runs in vain, who halts through weakness before reaching the goal.' Once more, therefore, we must own it; yes, inconstancy is a cruel robber which despoils us of all the merits we had already acquired.

2. *It leads us to perdition.*

This mobility of the soul, always fluctuating in its conduct, leads it insensibly from fall to fall to the brink of the abyss, and almost infallibly terminates its life by a last act of inconstancy which decides and consummates its eternal ruin. How, in reality, can this perpetual vacillation between good and evil, between tepidity and fervour, inspire us with a well-founded hope of obtaining the grace of final perseverance? Does it not, on the contrary, give us reason to apprehend that, having so frequently resisted the loving cares of our Divine Lord, we shall die at enmity with Him?

Behold the great, the fearful evil which our inconstancy in the way of perfection causes us; it disposes and insensibly leads our soul to this last and irreparable infidelity, which consummates our entire and definitive separation from God. An unalterable firmness in well-doing confirms us in a happy stability of justice, which

merits and insures for us the gift of final perseverance; but on the contrary, a perpetual inequality of behaviour leads us infallibly to this last and mortal inconstancy, which is man's greatest misfortune, since it causes his eternal damnation: 'Lord, who art always the self-same,' permit not that I be of the number of 'those wandering stars to whom the storm of darkness is reserved for ever.' Grant rather that I may be of the number of those faithful servants whom, in reward for their perseverance, Thou hast promised by Thy beloved disciple to establish as so many pillars in the Temple of God.

3. *It augments the trials and difficulties of virtue.*

But let us suppose that we should not always impute to our instability of character that last and deplorable inconstancy which terminates a life in sin; still we may at least confidently assert that it increases and aggravates the difficulties we already experience in following the ways of justice. The inconstant man resembles the boatman who reascends the current of a rapid river, and who can only advance his barque by triumphing over the resistance of the opposing torrent by unheard-of exertions. Should his strength give way, should his weary hand relax its hold of the oar, the boat, abandoned by its pilot, is carried away by the river in its course, and in a moment the labour of the day is lost. A new Sisyphus, the inconstant man rolls a rock which falls back by its own weight from the declivity of the mountain the moment that the effort by which he was raising it is interrupted; not only is all his fatigue thus unavailing, but to reascend to the same point he must overcome still greater obstacles; before resuming his first efforts must refasten the cord which the enormous weight

has broken. With truth, therefore, has Ecclesiasticus said: 'When one buildeth up and another pulleth down; what profit have they but the labour?' If to-day thou destroyest by thy tepidity what thy fervour built up yesterday; if to-morrow thou tearest up by thy inconstancy what thy piety has planted to-day, what fruit wilt thou gather therefrom except a double trouble?

Inconstancy prevents us from acquiring the habit of virtue; should we have already acquired it, it considerably diminishes its strength, and sometimes occasions its utter ruin. It even causes us to contract habits of vice; or else it reawakens those which lay dormant; it rekindles and inflames the fire which seemed extinguished beneath the ashes. Therefore it is that the unstable soul, far from ever attaining solid virtue, goes so far as to practise with difficulty the good for which it formerly possessed much facility, so that its spiritual cure becomes, I will not say impossible, but at least extremely difficult.

In a word, this perpetual instability, this continual fluctuation between good and evil, destroys the virtues we had acquired, revives the obstacles that we had surmounted in the way of virtue, and finally deprives us of the hope of ever attaining to perfection. A man who frequently relapses into the same disease finds his constitution gradually weakened, he even sees his life threatened with an approaching dissolution; thus, he who relaxes from his first fervour and obeys the instability of a tepid and languishing will already diffuses an odour of death, as it were, into his soul: he is no longer fit to receive those special graces, the privation of which delivers us up defenceless to the terrible assaults of Satan, and exposes us to an almost inevitable ruin. It was the experience of this truth that

made St. Laurence Justinian say: 'Those persons descend more promptly than they have ascended, they are less holy at the end than at the commencement, and it would have been better for them not to have known the truth or entered the difficult paths of justice than to have received the light, and shamefully recoiled after having begun.' Oh, great and immutable God! how can I fail to detest and abhor my inconstancy, which is the source of so many misfortunes!

4. *It renders us deserving of contempt.*

Instability in virtue debases and renders us contemptible in the eyes of angels and of men, and even of the demons. The Holy Ghost compares the inconstant and unstable man to a fool, 'who changes as the moon.' All who know him despise him, they laugh at his fine resolutions, and with St. Prosper, they style him a saint of a few weeks.

What do I say? the devil himself is no more disturbed by the vain desires of such an one, than the rock is moved by the dashing of the waves which vent their rage upon it. While the unstable man forms the most praiseworthy designs, while he declares his determination to extirpate his vices, while his imagination has already reached the pinnacle of perfection, Satan, concealed beside him, amuses himself at his expense, well knowing that this saint of an hour will speedily relapse into his vicious habits. 'The reason is,' says St. Bernard, 'that the devil fears nothing but perseverance, as he is not ignorant that it alone deserves the crown' which our Lord has promised.

Oh, how foolish then are those who, after having 'borne the burden and heats of the day,' having, with

a laudable emulation, long 'run in the race,' and for a considerable time courageously fought against the old serpent, have at length succumbed to lassitude, deserted from the army and laid down their arms; have quitted the Lord's vineyard, and ceased to labour at the last hour of the day, when they were on the point of receiving the reward, and the crown was about to be placed on their head. How foolish are those 'who went and wept, casting their seeds,' but who, in the time of harvest, have slothfully suspended their sickles on a tree, when, by bearing a little more trouble, 'they would come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves.' Volatile men! how great, then, is your folly 'that, whereas you began in the spirit, you would now be made perfect in the flesh.' That, after having undergone so many labours, borne such countless and painful evils, triumphed so frequently over such a host of enemies, you allowed yourself to be vanquished by your instability of mind, and shamefully succumbed at the moment that you were about to reach the term? How deplorable is this fatal negligence by which you so unworthily sacrificed the treasures which you had already amassed! How applicable to you is not this reproach of the Gospel: 'Behold men who began to build and were not able to finish' the edifice! 'Therefore, my beloved brethren,' says the apostle to us, let us blush at our faults, 'let us' be steadfast 'and immovable' in our resolution of leading a more holy life, 'knowing that our labour is not vain in the Lord;' 'let us so run in the race of virtue that we may obtain the prize.' Let us so courageously fight in the glorious arena of justice as to triumph over our enemies, 'for he alone who shall have striven lawfully shall be crowned,'

and whoever perseveres not to the end has not legitimately done so. 'Let us, then, be steadfast in the way of the Lord,' and weary not of suffering that we may not lose the reward of our works.

Yes, Eternal Father, 'as long as breath remaineth in me I will not depart from my justification which I have begun;' 'I will be faithful until death to the care of my perfection, that I may receive the crown of life.' Convinced of the advantages of perseverance, and of the misfortunes of which inconstancy is the source, I firmly resolve never to diverge from the paths of rectitude. 'Strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel, that I only bring to pass that which I have purposed, having a belief that it might be done by Thee.'

Article III.

Remedies for inconstancy.

In order to confirm our resolutions of persevering in virtue, it is necessary to know the remedies which we should oppose to our inconstancy, that is to say, the means calculated to fix the natural mutability of our heart, and at least to diminish, if not perfectly destroy, the obstacles which are to be met with in the pursuit of perfection.

I will point out three principal ones, which are: 1, frequently to recall to mind the motives for perseverance; 2, to unite ourselves frequently to Jesus Christ in the Blessed Eucharist; 3, to foresee and to despise the obstacles which might shake our constancy.

1. *Consideration of the motives for perseverance.*

Let us often resume the consideration of the advantages granted to perseverance, of the evils which follow inconstancy, and, in fine, of all the motives that have

been presented to us in the preceding chapters, to determine us to the practice of solid virtue. For reason teaches us that what confers and increases life may likewise ensure its preservation; consequently, the motives which have inspired us with the resolution to enter the paths of justice, cannot fail to maintain and fortify us in the will to persevere in it to the end. In effect, since virtue is as amiable, as attractive, as useful to-day as it was yesterday, since God is always the same, and His infinite perfections are immutable and always deserving of the same worship and love, the pious and frequent remembrance of these considerations must infallibly nurture and preserve the holy fire of fervour which they have already kindled in our soul.

Let us also sometimes recall to mind the reward granted to those who, by their undeviating stability in good, have gained the glorious crown of the elect, and the sad examples, on the contrary, of those who have been lost through their inconstancy. Had Saul, Judas, and Origen persevered, the one would have been numbered amongst the holiest of the kings of Israel, the other would shine as a bright star amongst the twelve apostles, and the last would occupy a throne amid the doctors of the Church: but how much are they to be pitied for having fallen away from the way of virtue on which they had entered!

On what a lofty throne would not that prophet now be seated whom God sent to Jeroboam at Bethel with this prohibition: 'Thou shalt not eat bread, nor drink water, nor return by the same way as thou camest,' had he obeyed the Lord's commands to the end with the same exactitude with which he commenced to execute them! At first, without allowing himself to be intimidated by

the king's presence, he courageously exclaimed 'against the altar in the name of the Lord:' he rejected the presents offered to him by the prince: he refused his invitation to his table; he abstained for a long time from eating and drinking, he even returned to his own country by a different route, according to the order he had received to this effect. Oh, how promising were these beginnings, how heroic was this behaviour, how exemplary this obedience!

But, alas! inconstancy triumphing over his courage obscured the glory of his former fidelity; he allowed himself to be seduced by a false prophet to whose house he consented to return; and, contrary to the prohibition of God, 'he ate bread and drank water there,' and by this unworthy weakness forfeited all the merit he had previously acquired; but God punished him 'by delivering him to a lion, which tore and killed him on the way.'

On the other hand, what imperishable glory did not Eleazar merit by his inviolable fidelity to the faith of his fathers! He 'was one of the chief of the Scribes, considering the dignity of his age and his ancient years, and his good life and conversation from a child; and choosing rather a glorious death than a hateful life, went forward voluntarily to the torment, determined not to do any unlawful things for the love of life, nor even to dissimulate obedience to the king by eating the forbidden meat. He died thus, leaving to the whole nation an example of virtue and fortitude.'

Such examples, but particularly those of the holy martyrs and the other Christian heroes, cannot but encourage us to imitate their constancy: it is by recalling their generous actions that we accustom ourselves to become, like them, stable in good.

2. *Frequent union with Jesus Christ present in the Blessed Eucharist.*

A frequent union with God, either by spiritual or sacramental communion, is another very excellent means of acquiring this holy stability; because it is at that time that our prayers are most efficacious for the obtaining of the gift of final perseverance. 'If Elias, sustained by food,' which was but the figure of this divine nutriment, 'could walk forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God,' how much more constancy and energy will not this Bread of the strong impart to enable us to ascend to the summit of perfection!

Yes; without doubt, this celestial food will communicate to us abundantly a strength equal to our wants. In presence of this sacred Ark, the rapid and inconstant waves of our heart, that is to say its perpetual instability, will be stilled as were the waters of the Jordan in former times, and become firm as an immovable wall. Whoever entertains a genuine devotion to the adorable Eucharist, will find in it a certain security for his good resolutions despite the violence of temptations, the fickleness of his disposition, and the overwhelming torrent of evil desires. 'Like a faithful sentinel he will stand upon his watch and fix his foot upon this tower.' He will joyfully exclaim with the apostle: 'I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me.'

Sustained by this divine food, we shall be able to conquer the difficulties of virtue, to surmount the subtleties of self-love, to elude the snares which the world spreads for us, to foil the artifices of hell, and to avoid the rocks against which our constancy was wont to suffer shipwreck. Perseverance and fortitude, as the two companions and

stays of our life, will lead us in safety in the path of Justice to Eternity's desirable port. Behold the salutary effects which the adorable Eucharist may produce in us.

3. To foresee and despise the difficulties of virtue.

The third means of perseverance consists in anticipating the causes of our inconstancy in virtue, and in fortifying our heart against such difficulties, but above all against its own instability. Our good-will usually encounters two chief obstacles in the service of God: the trials which are inseparable from it, and the very continuity of perseverance in good.

To the first obstacle, let us oppose a courage, which, triumphing over the repugnance of nature, shall cause us to despise all the trouble attached to the performance of the works: let us commence the good which we wish to do, with a determination of will, proportionate to the resistance we expect to find in it. For to attack the enemy deliberately is to have already vanquished him: to commence an action courageously is almost the same thing as to have consummated it, and in fine, to confront obstacles with generosity of spirit is equivalent to the removal of them.

Far from us be all pusillanimous procrastination; let us perform our good works diligently: emulating the example of Samson, let us seize 'the young lion,' whose roaring would terrify cowards, let us throw him down, let us 'tear him in pieces as we would a kid.' If we obtain this victory, what seemed difficult and, as it were, impossible to us, shall become light and easy.

A second and no less serious impediment to virtue is the thought of the length of time during which we shall have to do violence to ourselves. This temptation

is the more dangerous in that it induces sadness, disgust, and discouragement. We shall surmount this fear by the following means.

1. Let us recur to a pious stratagem against ourselves. Let us propose to ourselves to continue such a good action for one hour only, or at most for one or two days, without concerning ourselves as to what we shall do afterwards. Experienced persons affirm that there is no greater solace for our anxiety than this.

2. Let us contrast the length of time during which our efforts shall have to last with the eternity of glory which they will merit for us, and we shall see our apprehensions of an unlimited perseverance vanish like smoke. Besides, who has promised that we should live to an advanced age? It may be that death has already marked us out to be immediately his victim. Perhaps a few months hence our funeral rites shall be celebrated. Let us then devote to virtue at least the few days that remain to us.

But should our pilgrimage be prolonged, does not Almighty God deserve that we should consecrate to Him every moment of our lives? Oh heavens! when we received baptism, we bound ourselves by a solemn vow, pronounced by our sponsors in our name, to be faithful in the divine service to our last breath. But alas! the moment we received the use of reason, though we should immediately have offered a homage of it to God by the donation of our heart, we have only sinned against Him.

Ungrateful that we are! by a treason as shameful as it is criminal we cast off the yoke of the best of Masters, we incurred the guilt of sin at the same moment that we became endowed with reason, and since that first iniquity, we have lost the choicest years of our life in forgetfulness of God and in sinning against Him.

Is it not just, therefore, that to make full restitution to our Sovereign Lord, or at least to repair our past life, we should reserve the remainder of it for Him to whom our whole being belongs under so many titles? And since He has loved us from all eternity, since He has not loved Himself prior to loving us, and that He desires to continue to love us for endless ages, should we not be monsters of ingratitude were we to refuse to consecrate to His service the short time that remains to us? The vain pretext of the length of time during which we shall have to persevere, rests, as we may perceive, on a very frail foundation. And yet it is an obstacle which appals countless dastardly and timid souls, and diverts them from a virtuous life.

To fortify our courage, let us, in terminating this chapter, repeat these beautiful words of St. Cyprian: 'We conjure you by our common faith to preserve your glory by the courageous practice of a persevering virtue,' and not to abandon the path of Justice, either on account of the difficulty of the labour or the length of time that it must last, but rather guarantee yourself against the inconstancy of your heart by continual docility to grace, and by employing faithfully the means vouchsafed by the Divine Goodness for your instruction.

CONCLUSION.

IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT THIS THIRD PART REFERS TO THE UNITIVE LIFE.

WE have now, aided by the grace of God, reached the term of our labour in attaining to the end of the Unitive Life, which consists in intimate union with God, our

Sovereign Good. The mere titles of the chapters of this Third Part sufficiently show how suitable are the matters of which it treats to unite our soul with its last End. It unites it to the First and Increated Truth by faith; to the Infallible Fidelity by hope; to the Infinite Goodness by charity; and finally, by constant perseverance in good, it consummates all these holy unions. Whence I have a right to conclude that the subjects treated of in this Third Part relate to the Unitive Way.

I do not even except that of the second chapter, which treats of the evils which menace the tepid. For the remembrance of the anxiety experienced at death, the thought of judgment, and the excruciating torments that follow it, do not so exclusively appertain to the purgative life, as that a soul may not animate itself by this salutary fear, to the attainment of the sublime perfection of the Unitive Way. Such was the opinion of St. Ignatius, that experienced master of the spiritual life, when he proposed these very subjects for the second week of his exercises as most suitable motives to stimulate us to make a good election.

Let us, therefore, walk henceforward with a constant and firm step in the paths of the spiritual life, remove the obstacles to solid virtue, employ the means presented to us for its acquisition, and cease not to meditate on the motives which incite us to become perfect, that by the sanctity of our life and our perseverance in good, we may be eternally united to Him who is the term of the spiritual life and the end of all things.

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